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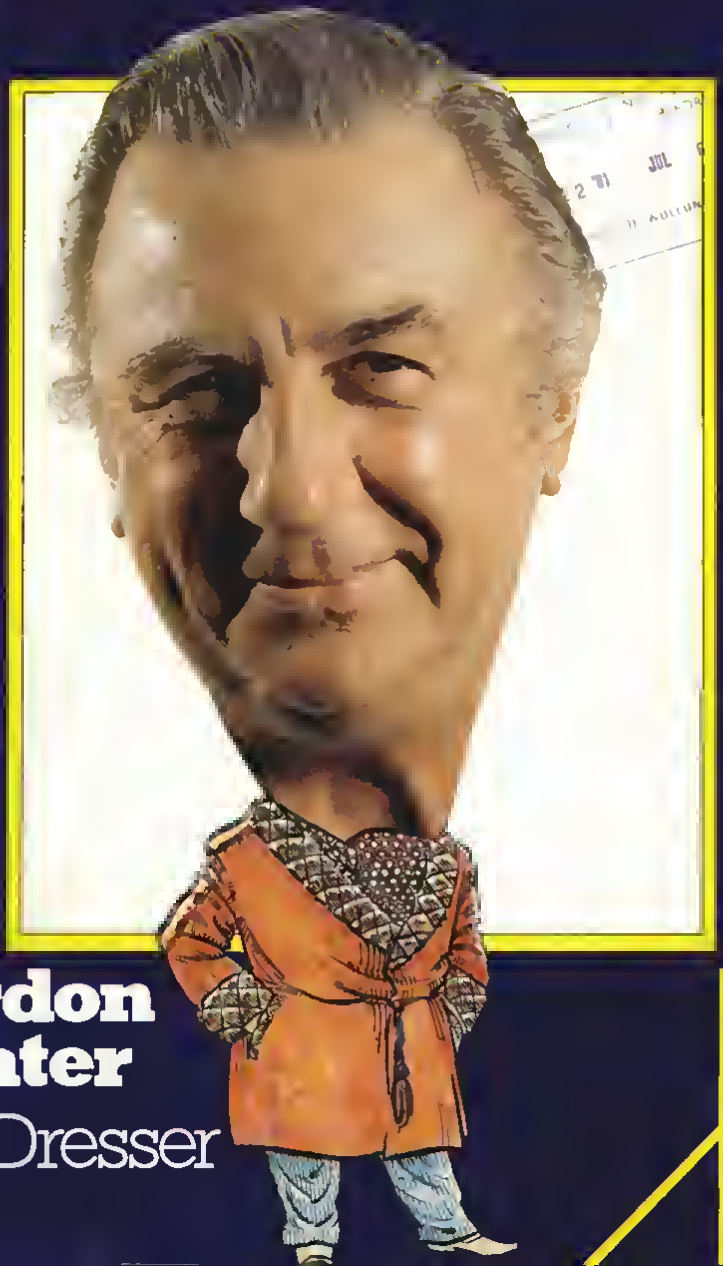
Theatre Australia



Gordon Chater
The Dresser

Judy Davis as LULU

The Sydney Theatre Company

in association with

The MLC Theatre Royal Company

presents

CHICAGO

A Musical Vaudeville

BOOK BY
FRED EBB & BOB FOSSE

MUSIC BY
JOHN KANDER

LYRICS BY
FRED EBB

based on the play 'Chicago' by Maurine Dallas Watkins

starring

NANCYE HAYES

GERALDINE TURNER

TERRY DONOVAN

with

JUDI CONNELLI
GEORGE SPARTELS
J.P. WEBSTER

DIRECTED BY
RICHARD WHERRETT

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
PETER CASEY

CHOREOGRAPHY
ROSS COLEMAN

SETTINGS BY
BRIAN THOMSON

COSTUMES BY
ROGER KIRK

LIGHTING BY
SUE NATTRASS

SOUND BY
COLIN FORD

BORAL

This production of CHICAGO has been generously sponsored by Boral Limited.

From June 6 to August 29

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE Drama Theatre
From June 6 to July 11

THEATRE ROYAL
From July 17 to August 29

Theatre Australia

June 1981, Volume 5, No. 10.

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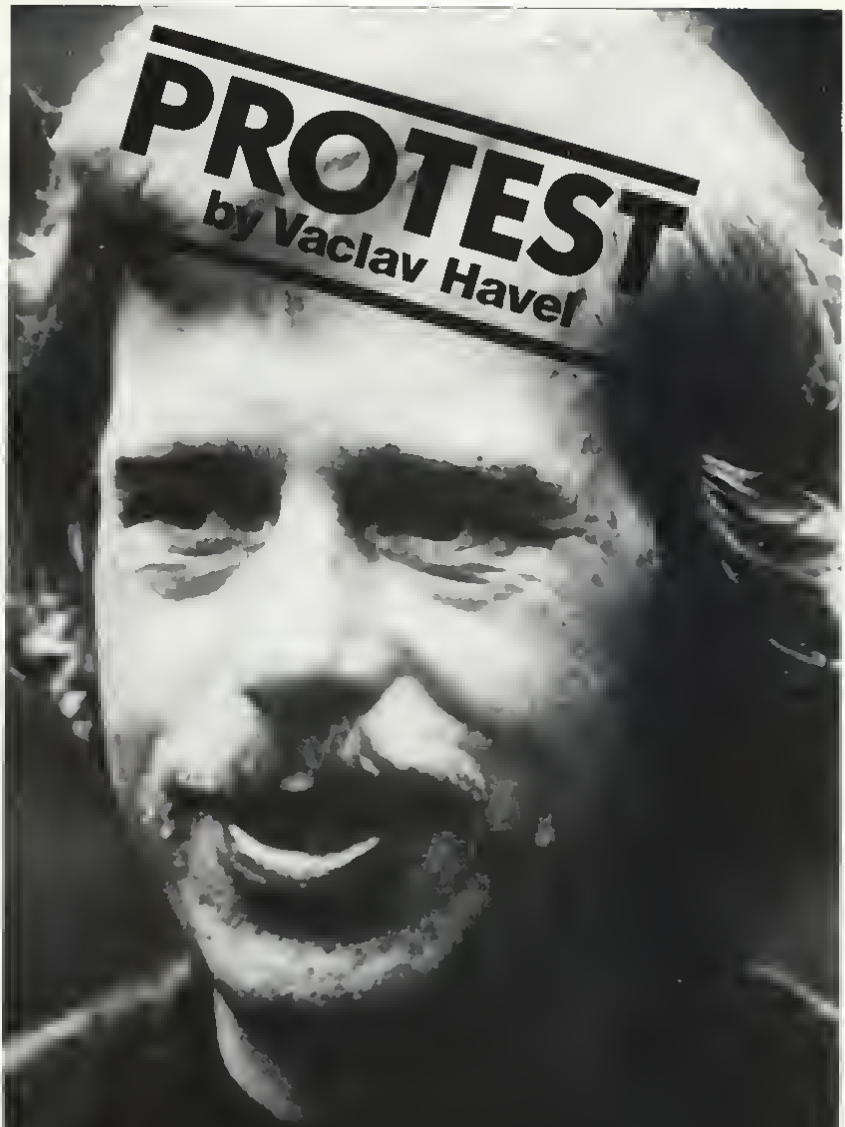

"In Germany, they first came for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no-one left to speak up."

Pastor Martin Nienoller

COMMENT

BY ROBERT PAGE

Adelaide Turmoil Over

At last, it seems the Adelaide Turmoil is over. The upshot is happier than anyone could have dared hope

Jim Sharman, in one of the most confidentially negotiated deals in a long time, has accepted the Directorship of the State Theatre Company of South Australia

The appointment is a tremendous coup It restores the fortunes of G M Paul Iles (now "Resident Administrator") in the publiz gaze and makes the embarrassing debacle of the Armfield affair pale into insignificance Even Neil's youthful haverings are forgiven, he is to direct the first show in the interim season when Kevin Palmer and Nick Enright stand down

Sharman needs no introduction, as simply *the* Australian director with the highest international profile London has seen his *Removalists* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, he has produced *The Rocky Horror Show* in the West End, LA, Sydney and New York, and he has directed *Hair* in Tokyo and Boston as well as Sydney and Melbourne It was he who wooed Patrick White back to the stage after a thirteen year hurt silence, and went on to film his story, *The Night the Prowler*

The Rocky Horror Picture Show's recurrent, late-night, cult following was born of his, and Richard O'Brian's fertile brain The Brad and Janet saga continues with *Shock Treatment* — due for Christmas release

Some have carped that he is all flair and little substance, an impression that his White revivals and opera productions instantly dispel The major hit of the last Adelaide Festival was of course his moving production of *Death in Venice* Then already Director designate for the 1982 Festival, he became the toast of Adelaide and the weather looked set for his term of office after the Hunt Affair

The appointment at STC will not properly begin until that task is discharged, but the announcement now gives the company a clear orientation when it seemed so hopelessly adrift Undoubtedly he will be planning from now on for the time when he takes the reins already he is speaking of various ideas — making the intervening season appear only a minor interregnum after Palmer and Enright depart

And the noises he is making are already what Adelaide wants to hear — "large scale productions and use of music" Colin George and the Festival Centre Trust have had the acumen to realise that the Athens of the South is really a place of provincial taste whose wealth (and pretension) allow it to mistake lavish productions for art Again, *Death in Venice* proved Sharman capable of giving both — and as such he should win audiences and critical acclaim

With that production he proved that, when pushed, an opera company way down the list could rise to first rate standard and it is at such heights that he hopes to keep the STC His aim is to take the company from the Playhouse to the Festival Theatre for extra special productions

Other innovations in the air are a managing triumvirate as opposed to having himself as supremo His title is to be Resident (not Artistic) Director, with Paul Iles and Louis Nowra as Resident Administrator and Dramatist respectively Incidentally, it is a welcome move to see the playwright's contribution valued so highly

The other major innovation is to move to a repertory system something which keeps the RSC and National Theatres in London so fresh and vital It means having a core company (twelve actors and, take note, three musicians) and a whole new approach to production management If it succeeds it may well herald a change in other major companies

In the meantime there is an interim season to get through which, with due respect to Paul Iles, looks like it would sit more happily in Nimrod or the Glasgow Citizens' (see "Info" for details), let us hope it works, but whatever happens everyone's gaze is now on April 1982

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INFO

MANAGERIAL SEASON AT STC, SA

After the withdrawal of Artistic Directors Kevin Palmer and Nick Enright from the State Theatre Company of SA, the Board was unable to find an appropriate replacement for the second half of the year, so General Manager Paul Iles has taken responsibility for the second 1981 season and the appointment of guest directors for the chosen productions. From 1982 the STC have secured the services of Jim Sharman as Artistic Director (see later interview) — an undoubted coup. Between his production of *Lulu* for the company and his taking up the appointment the following season has been arranged.

General Manager, Paul Iles

Neil Armfield, in spite of the embarrassment he caused the company earlier in the year, will kick off with a political revue called *Squirtz* that has contributions from Doreen Clarke, John Romeril, Steven Sewell, Jack Hibberd, Patrick Cook, Tim Robertson, Barry Oakley, and more. Performers will include Max Gillies, Evelyn Krape and Alan John.

British director Richard Cottrell will follow this in September with a production of the ultimate Jacobean revenge tragedy, *The Revenger's Tragedy* in which Dennis Olsen will play the Duke.

John Gaden will then be directing *No End of Blame*, Howard Barker's latest play about art and politics which received mixed reviews in England a few months ago. This will be John Gaden's first full scale direction. A *Threepenny Opera* directed by George Whaley, lately of NIDA, will be the last of the Playhouse season. At Theatre 62 two smaller productions — David Hare's *Fanshen* and a new Doreen Clarke play, *The Sad Songs of Annie Sando* — will be staged by Ken Boucher and Margaret Davis respectively.

A new resident company of actors will be engaged. Philip Quast and John Saunders will remain and they are to be joined by Heather Mitchell, Wendy Strehlow, Jim Holt (all 1980 NIDA graduates) and Simon Burke. Marilyn Allen, a Magpie member will also join the main company for the season.

EVITA'S BIRTHDAY SUCCESS

The Australian production of *Evita* had already been seen by half a million people by the time it celebrated its first birthday on Thursday April 30. Robert Stigwood, the Adelaide born entrepreneur who has mounted this show all over the world, gave one of Australia's reputedly most lavish parties to celebrate the launch here, and was back to host a slightly more intimate soiree for the anniversary.

The Adelaide season broke all box office records for the 2,000 seat Festival Theatre, playing to more than 94,000 people in just over six weeks; it went on to be seen by 70,000 in the three and a half month Perth season, and then by 240,000 people in the six months at Her Majesty's, Melbourne. Since its Sydney opening on February 14 over 100,000 people saw the show by the end of April.

EVITA™

Another indication of the show's incredible popularity here is that the original Australian cast album of the show has recently gone gold. It is believed to be the first time that an Australian cast recording has sold so many copies.

Productions of Evita are currently playing in New York, London, Los Angeles, Chicago, Vienna and Madrid, as well as Sydney.

MOBIL SPONSORS PERFORMING ARTS MUSEUM

Private sector sponsorship for the arts in this country has taken a step forward with Mobil Oil providing $300,000 for the Performing Arts Museum in Melbourne. The Museum will be located in the western end of the Melbourne Concert Hall, off the River Terrace, overlooking the Princes Bridge and the Yarra.

The Museum will cover all aspects of the performing arts — drama and dance, music and marionette, circus and spectacle.

Displays in the Museum will be based on various themes such as famous performers, the theatre that grew with the gold rush or memorable theatrical productions. The displays covering the life and career of Dame Nellie Melba alone will be of major interest and importance to music and theatre lovers throughout the world.

The Arts Centre has erected an enormous blue and white striped marquee covering the whole of the Murdoch Court. The marquee, reminiscent of the days of Wirth's Circus, will have on display fully

Australia's magazine of the performing arts
Theatre Australia

WE HAVE MOVED

Please note the Editorial Office of *Theatre Australia* is no longer at 80 Elizabeth Street, Mayfield. We are now fully based in Sydney, and can be found at

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We also apologise if the magazine has been late in reaching you. Copy was held up in the airline strike.

finished scale models of the interiors of the Melbourne Concert Hall and the State Theatre There is also a circus organ which will play music to a troupe of players performing on stage in front of the organ

Part of the Museum can be moved to other areas of the Centre or to regional performing arts centres throughout Victoria The organisers feel this will be a vital and positive element in the Centre acting as a catalyst in the development of arts in Victoria

STAR SHOW — A RECORD

The Hunter Valley Theatre Company holds the record — that of being the first subsidised theatre company to produce a recording of one of its own shows, for which an original score was written *The Star Show* was a documentary piece about the riot over the closing of the Newcastle Star Hotel, which the HVTC staged as its final production of 1980 The book was written by John McCallum and Peter Matheson, the music by Allan McFadden and the lyrics by all three

The HVTC company was augmented by local rock band the Musical Flags and the recording was also done locally by Cordial Factory Productions Backing for the venture came from Newcastle supporters and it is hoped that the first pressing of 1,000 copies will sell out

If the soundtrack contributed to the popularity of the show itself their hopes might well be fulfilled *The Star Show* was an overwhelming success when staged Hopefully the subtitle — "Tonite Heroes, Tomorrow Forgotten", taken from an augmented banner up outside the old Star — won't apply to the dramatisation as it has perhaps, to the event

Lederman and Frank Garfield in a scene from HVTC's The Star Show

PLAYWRIGHTS PROJECT AT TN

For relatively unknown playwrights in Australia, and indeed Brisbane, the difficulty is not so much writing a good play, but actually getting it put on stage

TN Director Brian Nason

Realising that this can be a frustrating problem for many local playwrights and also wanting to perform, where possible, local works, the TN Theatre Company is sponsoring a special Playwrights Project Five Brisbane playwrights have been invited to submit new scripts to TN on the understanding that one will be chosen to be performed by the company during this year's Warana Festival

Resident Director Bryan Nason commented, "I'm happy that we are able to schedule a new play by a Brisbane writer at a time when Brisbane is celebrating its own local festival The idea behind the project is not to run a 'playwrights competition' with a cash prize for the 'winner', but to give real on-going encouragement and support to a handful of local writers, and to give one writer the chance of working with a professional theatre company"

A few months ago John Bradley, Eric Fitzjohn, Bev Mahoney, Greg Rudd and Narelle Biddle all got together with Bryan Nason so the guidelines could be set down before any writing or ideas were formulated In early May about 20 minutes of each writer's script was workshopped by

specially selected TN actors, and soon the play will be selected which is to have a full production in September

THE LONE ANZAC AND NO ONE

Mike Mullin's No one project received enormous publicity when, in the guise of the Lone Anzac, he was arrested on Australia Day for "causing serious alarm and affront in a public place to reasonable persons" The ludicrousness of the charges were emphasised when the police dropped them for lack of evidence, but the point of the entire exercise was never made very clear either. Mike Mullins received some $11,000 from the Theatre Board for his activities this year — a substantial amount in view of the limited funds available to, and financial difficulties of many theatre companies in 1981.

No one continues his personal mission, however "The Invasion of No one" is a projected meeting of 521 No ones, an outdoor event which involves ten black buses, ten black rolls royces and a black helicopter A one metre by 23 metre red neon sign and a huge complexity of sound equipment for an audio environment will also be used Further to this project, "With the assistance of the Australia Council a feasibility study has been conducted The project has interesting and complex problems, but has been found to be feasible Negotiations are in progress for the realisation of this project in mid '82."

More practical plans apparently include a "comic book musical about some people who have the mistaken idea that they're Americans", a large scale performance of which is due this year and the establishment of 199 Cleveland Street, Redfern as a full performance venue

Perhaps in time all will become clear, but if not it is to be hoped that the Australia Council will at some stage give an indication of what the public have to gain from what could be seen as simply a series of outdated "happenings"

NEW THEATRE COMPANY FOR WA

WA has yet another new theatre company this year As of May 1 the Winter Theatre opened, to serve the city of Fremantle which until now has been well served by all art forms except the performing arts The company's innovators believe that the future of theatre in WA rests with the development of new talent and intend to provide an ensemble training ground for young people who have decided on a career in theatre

The inaugural season opens on June 5 with a production of Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* starring Robert Alexander in the central role of the Maniac It will be followed by another recent Nimrod choice, Errol Bray's *The Choir* — this time with an all female cast! With the central image that of castration?

In August the Winter Theatre plan to premiere a new musical as yet untitled, an observation of several days in the life of a photographic super model who is finding it difficult to cope with the pressures involved

1981 Artistic Director is Ross Coli who, with Administrator Ellen Grech, will head a company that includes Jenny Vuletic, Glenn Swift, Sharon Kershaw, Willy Kerr, Marcelle Schmitz, Grant Cottrell and Christina Parry

Funding is coming from the WA Arts Council, Fremantle City Council and the Australia Council Theatre Board

Artistic Director Ross Coli

NEW PERFORMING ARTS SCHOOL IN SYDNEY

A new school, the Sydney School of Creative and Performing Arts is due to open early this month The two directors, Tricia Cullum — ex-creative arts consultant with the NSW Department of Education — and Patrick Simpson schools performer have created the project "to challenge and assist kids to find and develop their own process of learning eg investigating expressing, communicating, evaluating therefore becoming critical creative thinkers and doers."

They have got themselves 4,000 square feet of space "just off Broadway" where the facilities will include a dance studio a theatre studio, an art craft studio, a sound room (an old 20 x 20 concrete safe), plus changing rooms and toilets

The intention is to create for Sydney a centre for the arts — theatre music visual arts, movement dance, audio visual, literature and poetry Within this environment they hope to establish an Arts Access Centre where children and adults can join in classes to discover their own artistic creativity Skills and techniques will be developed as the need arises

Quite how this idealistic and ambitious project will fare will be interesting to watch The only present funding Cullum and Simpson can be sure of is that "from our own pockets", though they are hopeful of grants from the Australian Council

Schools Commission, and will be looking for sponsorship from individuals and foundations who assist the promotion of the arts, and also the business world.

PATRICIA KENNEDY AND THE WIZARD OF OZ

Actress Patricia Kennedy has been receiving great acclaim for her taped narration of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Arts Management Australia have put together a touring production, directed by Rex Reid, of that well loved story and are touring it round Victorian centres from June 15. 25 country centres will see the show, 10 Melbourne metropolitan locations and there will be a major city season at the Palais Theatre.

As well as Patricia Kennedy's narration, *The Wizard of Oz* has an all-Gershwin score and colourful sets and costumes, and teachers can get hold of a free 26-page teaching aid kit in advance.

Now that the touring company Kolobok has closed and the Victorian Arts Council is touring only in-school shows this year, the Arts Management Australia productions (of which *Peter and the Wolf* is the other one) are the only full-scale theatre productions available to Victorian children in 1981. It is expected that 100 000 children will see *The Wizard of Oz* next term.

CHICAGO IN SYDNEY

The Sydney Theatre Company's big musical of the year opens on the 6th of this month — it is *Chicago*, the razzle dazzle American musical that satirises 30's gangster land. Directed by Richard Wherrett it stars Nancye Hayes and Geraldine Turner, with Terry Donovan, Judy Connelli, George Sparteles and J P Webster. Peter Casey is musical director, Ross Colman choreographer; the sets have been designed by Brian Thomson and the costumes by Roger Kirk.

Its theme is the satire of the corruption of society that occurs when individuals or issues are judged through the media. The story line is so improbable that it could only be inspired by fact. Some of the better known songs that come from *Chicago* are "Razzle Dazzle", "All That Jazz" and "All I Care About Is Love".

It is certainly predicted as a success; with 18 in the cast and 12 musicians the show is booked for a further run at the Theatre Royal from July 17.

Nancye Hayes

Writer Michael Mitchener, Patricia Kennedy and choreographer Rex Reid with the Cowardly Lion from the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Photo: Herald and Weekly Times

NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR FOR THE MARIAN ST.

Marian Street Theatre have announced John Milson as the theatre's new Artistic Director.

He has been a full-time theatre director since 1969, initially specialising in music theatre, with productions for opera companies in all states throughout Australia. During this period in his career, he also directed for the Australian Theatre for Young People, and the 1973 NIDA Jane Street season.

From 1974 until 1978, John was Artistic Director of the Hole in the Wall Theatre Perth. During this period spent in WA he was also guest director for the WA Opera Company, the WA University Dramatic Society, The Festival of Perth, The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of WA, and many other performing bodies. In 1977, he was appointed to the Australia Council Theatre Board, remaining until January 1980.

In 1979, he was appointed director of the Twelfth Night Theatre Company Brisbane, and during this time, his talents were sought as guest director for the Queensland Opera, the Queensland Conservatorium and La Boite Theatre.

Since this time, Milson has been a freelance director for the National Theatre Perth, the Queensland Theatre Company, the Canberra Opera, the Brisbane Actor's Company, and most recently, the Victorian State Opera Company.

With his reputation for avant garde and experimental theatre as at the Hole and TN, Marian Street can perhaps look to a very different repertoire from the boulevarde fare that has been its staple in recent years.

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WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS

by Norman Kessell

Victorians, at long last, are to see in September the **Nimrod Theatre's** smash-hit of 1979, **Nick Enright's** musical adaptation of **Carlo Coldoni's** *The Venetian Twins*, with score by **Terence Clarke**.

The revival production opens a three-state tour at Sydney **Seymour Centre's York Theatre** on July 9, then to Canberra on Aug 18, the **Adelaide Opera House** on Aug 25, Melbourne on Sept 16 and Geelong's **Ford Theatre** n Oct 16 (Melbourne venue still being negotiated, following a double-booking mix-up.)

Show will have original cast except for **Jennifer McGregor**, who has other commitments.

The Nimrod, for its 1981 Season Two, is contracting a resident company of four actors and actresses — those who have accepted at the time of writing being **Anna Volska, Michele Fawdon, Cathy Downes, Deidre Rubenstein** and **Barry Otto** — and has been at pains to choose plays giving equal opportunities to all of them to develop their range and skills, but at the same time continue to reflect the theatre's ideological stance and have relevance in social content.

For the Upstairs Theatre programme is Aug 12, *Cloud Nine*, by **Caryl Churchill**, directed by **Aubrey Mellor**; Oct 7, *Last Days In Woolloomooloo*, by **Ron Blair**, directed by **John Bell**; Nov 25, *Tales From The Vienna Woods*, by **Odon von Horvath**, directed by **Aubrey Mellor**; Jan 27, *Welcome The Bright World*, by Nimrod playwright in residence **Peter Stephen**, directed by **Neil Armfield**.

For Downstairs, the directors were waiting for what might come out of this year's Australian Playwrights Conference, but opening on July 29 is *Slice*, by **Tony Strachan**, a piece reflecting life in Sydney and based on a concept by **Kim Carpenter**, who will design and direct. Another work by **Strachan**, *The Eyes of the White*, directed by **Nell Armfield**, opens Nov 4.

I mentioned last month the rumours rife about revivals of musicals, so I was interested to learn that the **Elizabethan Theatre Trust's** entrepreneurial thrust for the eighties is towards musicals. First up is participation with the **Adelaide Festival Trust** and **Michael Edgley International** in an Australian production of the Broadway success *Barnum*. This is due to open in Adelaide on Jan 13 next year, followed by Sydney on March 5, Melbourne on June 11 and Brisbane on Sept 13.

I hear the **Trust** also has rights to three other musicals it contemplates staging in the latter half of next year and another in the pipeline is a revival of **Albert Arlen's** musical based on **C J Dennis'** *The Sentimental Bloke*. Also a possibility is a revival of *My Fair Lady*, if and when the climate seems right. Unfortunately, however, the Trust had to cancel, for financial reasons, a Sydney season due to have opened last month of the **Q Theatre's** original rock opera, *Paradise Regained*.

And, if another rumour is true, don't be surprised to find the Ensemble's **Hayes Gordon** back in the musical field. Remember those marvellous potted musicals he staged at Menzies Hotel a few years back?

Musicals apart, the **Trust** has a busy schedule ahead, starting with a double bill at Sydney's **Wayside Chapel Theatre** on June 9 — **Olive Bodill** in **Barney Simon's** *Miss South Africa* and **Leila Blake** in Melbourne writer **Barry Dickins'** *The Death of Minnie*.

Later, **Olive Bodill** will star in a new **Athol Fugard** play, *Aloes*, which opens in Adelaide Aug 13, Melbourne Sept 10, Hobart Sept 27 and Canberra Oct 11. After a break, the production will then be seen at the 1982 **Perth Festival** before coming on to Sydney next February.

Other tours in which the Trust is involved include **Marcel Marceau** (Perth, July 6, Sydney, July 20, Melbourne, Aug 3, Brisbane, Aug 17), the **Australian Dance Theatre** (Townsville, Aug 12, Rockhampton, Aug 17, Brisbane, Aug 24, Sydney, Aug 31) and in 1982 the **American Ballet Theatre** (Sydney, July 19, Melbourne, Aug 2), **Sadler's Wells Ballet** (Sydney, Oct 11, Brisbane, Oct 25, Melbourne, Nov 1, Adelaide, Nov 8, Perth, Nov 15). A long-planned visit by the **Peking Opera** has been deferred until 1983 because Brisbane's new **Lyric Theatre**, which it is to open, will not be ready until then.

Memories of the old **Phillip Street Theatre** were brought flooding back by display advertisements in recent issues of *Variety* offering three musicals by **Lance Mulcahy**. (That's right, Sydney! You remember, too.) They are *Shakespeare's Cabaret*, with the Bard's lyrics set to music by Lance, *Keystone*, a musical about the early days of silent movies with book by **John McKellar** (right again! The one and only) and lyrics by **John and Dion McGregor**. The third is even more nostalgic, **Sheridan's** *The Duenna* adapted and composed by Lance. Who'll ever forget the great performances by **Ruth Cracknell, John Parker**, whom I last saw in London with **June Bronhill** and **Keith Michell** in *Robert and Elizabeth*, and **Moira Redmond**, who also went on to bigger things in the UK, most recently a major role in the TV series *Edward VII*?

Actor-singer-writer **Anthony Newley**, here in April for a brief season with **Julie Anthony** at St George Leagues Club, enjoyed an unexpected reunion at a luncheon at which he was guest of honour. Among those present was a lady with whom he had studied when young, **Ruth Conti**, then a teacher at the famous school established by her aunt, **Italia Conti**. Now retired and living in Sydney, Miss Conti was a guest at the lunch of actor **Brett Neville**, who recently won unanimous critical praise for his performance as the schoolmaster in **Justin Fleming's** play, *Hammer*, at both the Phillip Street and Ensemble theatres.

Warren Mitchell, tongue only slightly in cheek, told me alls he needs to create a character is a wig and the right pair of trousers. "I have a beaut wig for *The Dresser*", he added. The play, kwhich he says he saw five times in London kwithout learning why such an "in" play became so popular, is now at Sydney's Royal, moves to Melbourne's Comedy July 7; Townsville's Civic Aug 10, Rockhampton's Pilbeam Aug 25, Brisbane's Her Majesty's Sept 1 and Perth's Regent Sept 24.

Gordon Chater, co-starring with **Mitchell** and **Ruth Cracknell** in *The Dresser*, said he could not understand Sydney's lukewarm response to that fine play, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* (now in Melbourne, then for Adelaide's Opera Theatre, July 6, Townsville, July 13, Rockhampton, July 20, Brisbane, July 27). "I played the judge for 36 weeks on an extensive US and Canadian tour and we had packed houses all the way," he said.

NIDA

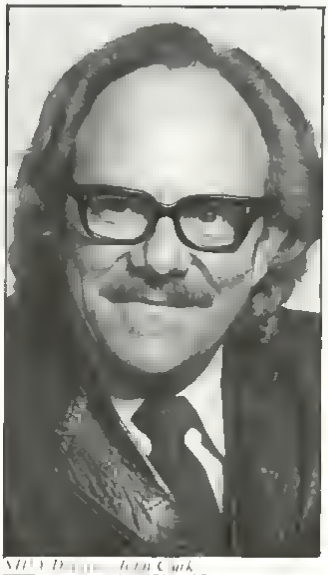
A BIG NEW MOVE

In 1979, its 21st year of existence, the National Institute of Dramatic Arts was at a crossroads, taking stock of its enormously successful, but shoestring formative and developing years and wondering what the future held for its maturity. Until that time it had existed, as a sort of guest department, in virtual squalor and unbelievably cramped conditions on the campus of the University of New South Wales. It could not continue to hold its lead of theatrical training establishments with such limited facilities and there were a few possibilities in the offing which had to be pursued. The one that seemed most likely was for the (ex-Old Tote) Parade Theatre, on the same campus, to become their centre for operations with adjoining buildings converted for administration, rehearsal and training space.

That was the most restrained possibility open to them. Now it seems that through good luck and good management they will be able to take a far bigger step, which will put them in the forefront of drama training establishments the world over.

At the last election the Prime Minister's threefold arts platform consisted of a promise of a new building for the Film and Television School, tax incentives for the film industry and a new home for NIDA. The Government was aware that if they were to promote the film industry they would need first rate actors. Consequently there were ministerial visits to NIDA, general shock at the situation they found, favourable assessment of previous work and finally a recent promise from the Prime Minister of a $3 million capital grant for a new building at the University of Sydney next to the Seymour Centre.

As soon as the allocation has gone through Cabinet work will start on the new NIDA building, slightly down hill from the Seymour Centre itself. By the beginning of 1983 they will have moved their entire operation to there, and in addition taken over the management of the Seymour Centre with its three theatres and additional facilities. NIDA will have become the largest and most extensive theatrical organisation in Sydney, with perhaps only the Melbourne Theatre Company ahead of it in the country.



NIDA Director John Clark

In their own building they will have six, two-storey rehearsal rooms studios where their acting, voice and movement classes will take place. The smallest will be the same size as the Seymour Centre Downstairs Theatre, the largest almost twice the dimensions of the York Theatre stage. For the first time classes will not have to be divided into three, thus trebling the teaching hours, and at last the students will have training spaces of comparable size to those in which they can expect to work professionally.

There will also be adequate props and scenery manufacturing studios and storage space, as well as a library (to be available for use by the profession), plant room, student room and administration offices.

Director John Clark has no plans to greatly expand the number of students when they move into the new premises. He sees these facilities as ensuring adequate training for the present and the forseeable future for the rather more than 100 students that are enrolled at any one time, to take on more he believes, would be to negate the point of the enlarged facilities and would produce more trained people than the industry could employ. The only area that could increase is the technical side where there is a constant demand. NIDA's technical graduates are snapped up instantly. Bill Gaskill praised their stage managers as the best he had ever worked with after his production of *Hamlet* and now they will have more practical experience before graduation. Presently such skills as lighting design are taught theoretically and the only practical experience to be had is in the tin shed that passes as the NIDA Theatre.

Clark does hope, though, to make available a number of one-off courses as specific need or demand arises. Six month, advanced courses for professionals in such areas as administration or lighting design would doubtless be well subscribed without lumbering the NIDA administration with continuing courses that may not be required on a permanent basis. He also

looks to using any extra studio, or foyer space for seminars, discussions and part time courses.

So much for the regular work of NIDA, but what of its role with the Seymour Centre complex? John Clark and Administrator Elizabeth Butcher are convinced that the Centre will be more appropriately managed by a theatre orientated organisation than by a bureaucracy locked into the University of Sydney administration, but emphasise that they do not wish the Centre to become totally identified with NIDA. It is part of the University of Sydney, though, and the Seymour bequest made clear it should be used for educational purposes, so what could be more appropriate than that it should be run by the major drama training institution?

The Everest Theatre will become the NIDA theatre, where its big public productions will go on. As there are rarely more than four of these each year there are plans for it to be used also by the Film and Television School as a venue to show student films, by the Conservatorium for its new opera productions, by the Australian Ballet School and for the productions of the AB's junior touring company and for Sydney showings of the Victorian College of the Arts School of Dance. On top of this there is a standing commitment to Musica Viva and the Seymour Group concerts, but the overall intention is for the Everest to become identified with high quality, youth productions where can be seen the work of young, aspiring professionals in the performing arts.

The Downstairs studio theatre is to remain the experimental venue to which University of Sydney students have major access, but mutual help between NIDA and the University should mean that design students can get practical experience building sets, working on lighting and directing students can draw on actors from the University for experimental productions etc. Cross-fertilisation between students of many disciplines, including music, can only lead to a burgeoning of interesting work.

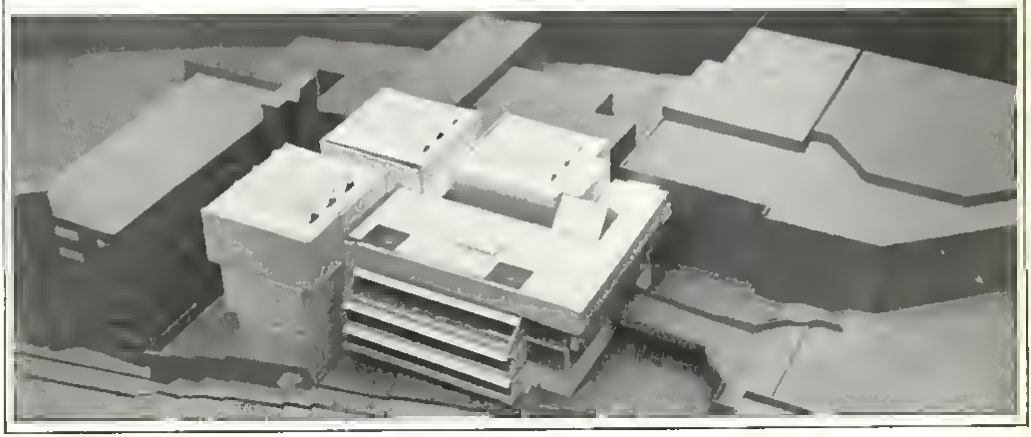
In the big York Theatre, though, Clark and Butcher plan to run top class professional seasons along the lines of the interim Sydney Theatre Company of 1979. Companies like Nimrod, Sydney Theatre Company and the Melbourne and Queensland Theatre Companies will be invited to plan large-scale productions for this 850 seat theatre as part of their seasons or touring work. This venue will have no connection with NIDA's work, but, they hope, will provide the larger, classical theatre and transfer house for smaller companies that Sydney is so lacking at present.

Eventually the restaurant and bars will come under NIDA management also and the idea is to promote these as greenroom-type areas where food and drink is cheap and public, students and professionals can mingle in an informal atmosphere. If, however, NIDA's administration of the Seymour Centre becomes burdensome to them, or unsuitable to the University the agreement can be terminated after five years, and NIDA can withdraw to its own building and make other arrangements for performing venues.

But this is looking a long way forward, and in spite of the advanced state of NIDA's plans — architectural designs for the new building are complete — there is still a long haul before they all come to fruition. The $3 million capital grant will pay for the construction of the building, but it has been left pretty much up to NIDA itself to find the wherewithall to fully equip it. The paltry facilities at UNSW leave them pretty badly off, for example the entire technical studio runs at present on one power saw and a lathe.

They will also need to finance the increased running costs of the new premises, at least they now share the standard services of all university departments like cleaning and electricity. But Elizabeth Butcher and John Clark are optimistic that they will be able to do this and are "amazed at how realistically the budgets have worked out".

Their first move was at a recent dinner at which the Prime Minister addressed the assembled guests on the resiting of NIDA and the pledges the Government has made to help. Those invited were prominent business people, NIDA graduates and some press; the dinner's prime function was to start the fund-raising effort. The task of raising some further million dollars may seem a large one in the present climate, but then who would have predicted such generosity from the Government? NIDA staff are quietly confident, and with their present run of success they have every reason to be so.



COMMUNITY THEATRE

NOT SAYING OTHER PEOPLE'S WORDS: The Role of the Victorian College of the Arts in developing community theatre in Victoria. By Suzanne Spunner.

In May this year the Victorian College of The Arts (VCA) was incorporated under its own act of Parliament During the debate which preceded the passing of the bill extensive reference was made to the role of the college in setting up community theatres in Victoria In supporting the bill, Labor MP, Mr Cathie said

> There have been solid achievements by the VCA and some of these achievements have been created because of a new and promising development, as a group of students go through the college, they then proceed to develop regional theatre throughout Victoria One only has to look at the history of the performing arts companies that have gone to Burwood Moonee Ponds, and to the River Murray They were able to write their own theatre, and they have played to football clubs, schools, mothers' clubs housewives and other organisations That is a promosing development, because it means that the large expenditure on the arts is enabling the arts to reach a wider section of the community
> *Hansard* 7 April, 1981

The three groups referred to are WEST centred in the north western suburbs of Essendon and Moonee Ponds, the Murray River Performing Group (MRPG) based in Albury Wodonga and Theatreworks based in Burwood and serving Melbourne's eastern suburbs Each group was formed by graduates from the VCA

The Drama School of the VCA took in its first students in 1976 and they graduated in 1978 In 1979 WEST and MRPG were established, while Theatreworks comprises 1980 graduates and was established this year All three groups had worked in the various regions in the final year of their course, researching the community in which they intended working, devising and performing shows while still students

MRPG's Fruit Fly Circus

Not all VCA drama students see community theatre as their vocation, however, for those that do the College provides a unique opportunity to develop the necessary skills Many students already interested in community theatre choose to come to the College for this reason, whilst others discover the area during their course

The originator and architect of this development is the Dean of the Drama School, Peter Oyston Oyston is a Melbourne born actor and director who had set up a regional theatre group in the UK before he returned to Australia to take up the appointment at the College He related how he became interested in developing community theatre

"I was the director of a touring company in the UK After a hard day's work in a town which had no theatre, some of the company and mysell walked into a local pub and a friendly old man behind the bar said, 'Eh, where did ye come from?' and the actor said 'From London', and he said 'We're putting on some plays for your community' And the man said 'Oh, you're one of them that tarts up 'is face and says other people's words are ye?'

"That was a big shock The next day we had a company meeting and decided that even though idealistically we were taking theatre to the people, our idealism was misplaced We decided to not be people who 'tart up their faces and say other people's words', but to be people who say the words of the people we're communicating to and with and for That meant starting a community theatre; that we had to start writing in a place which people could recognise, and on the presentation of that writing in a theatre form, could say 'Ah, that's about us, and not just us in general but that's about my grandfather or me, or my grandmother.'

"The premise of the work is that culture must be connected to our everyday life, the incidents and issues that really exist in our lives It must be a celebration of those issues and a way in which the things which are really important to us can be laughed at, can be dreamed through and expressed so that we can actually cope and in so doing not smother our lives This

means that the key people in a community theatre are the writers, the directors and the researchers the people that will search out the old stories that have almost been forgotten gone like water into sand — and bring them back to life so people can celebrate their continuity

"This is especially important in Australia; we have a history of extraordinary events that have just been barely remembered If we as Australians are going to celebrate our culture, then community theatre should be given absolute and utter priority, in policy terms by all the funding bodies I can see no intellectual reason except for people stuck in historical moulds why community theatre shouldn't be the most exciting cultural force in Australia throughout the eighties and nineties "*

The way in which these ideals are articulated in the three groups varies in details but concurrs in its three-pronged approach — theatre of, with and for the community The range of each group's activities serves a spectrum of community needs Theatre from the community means the creation of theatre from the raw material of the lives of people living in the community Thus WEST created *Roma*, a one-woman show about the experience of being a housewive in Essendon from the writings of local women about their lives, *Riff Raff* a rock musical for teenagers was written by members of the group from material generated in workshops with fourth form students from a nearby high school, while *The Players*, a men-only show about football, was created from research collected in the changing rooms of the Essendon and district league

Similarly MRPG developed a theatre restaurant piece, *The River Boat Show* about the golden age of the river trade on the Murray, and *On The Outside* was written in conjunction with members of the Educational Programme for Unemployed Youth and was described as a theatrical vocation guidance kit *Love Of My Life* came from research and work with staff and patients at the Albury Base Hospital and it explored the experience of the elderly in institutional care

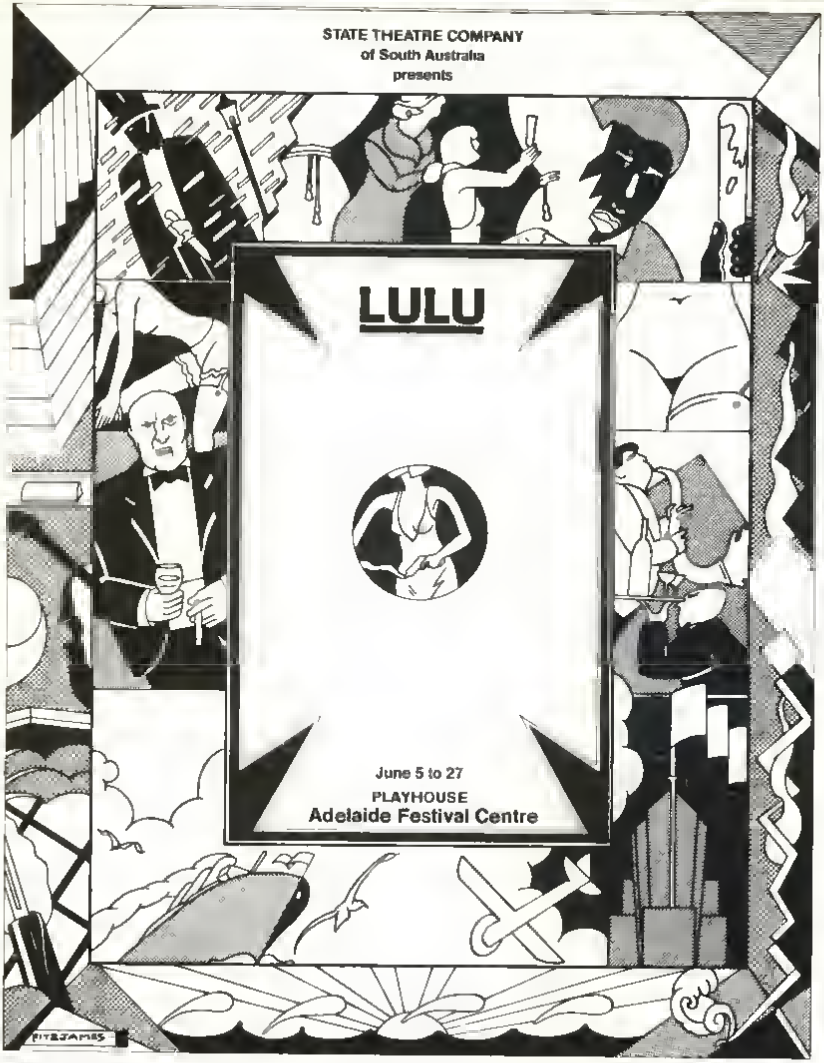
Theatreworks' *Dee Jay View*, a rock anthology, combined extensive social history research with an examination of the lives of eight people who were teenagers in the fifties, and their coming production, *The Middle Of The Road Show* is a comedy musical about the Eastern suburbs car culture

The raw material for all these productions came *from* the community and the theatre which resulted was performed *for* the community In general none of the groups utilises existing scripts or draws material from outside their communities, however to say that they work regionally and specifically is not to say that their work is parochial Rather they work from the inside out to encompass wider issues in Australian society

WEST's Artistic Policy describes this process "It is through concentrating on portraying the specifics

Continued on Page 56.

**Interview with Peter Oyston conducted by Martin Foot as part of the research for a forthcoming Australia Council CAPER on Community Theatre*



Direction Jim Sharman, Set Design Brian Thomson, Costume Design Luciana Arrighi, Music Sarah de Jong, Lighting Design Nigel Levings with Brandon Burke, Sharon Calcraft, Geoffrey Clendon, Ralph Cotterill, Judy Davis, Margaret Davis, John Frawley, Robert Grubb, Russell Kiefel, Malcolm Robertson, Juliet Taylor, Kerry Walker, John Wood.

From Wedekind's classic dramas of passion, power-play, contradiction and intrigue, Louis Nowra has fashioned an expressionist world of Weimar luxury, Berlin nightclubs and Parisienne casinos, to journey with its heroine to an inevitable conclusion in fog-bound London on the brink of apocalypse. Described by Wedekind as "Love's sleep-walker", the figure of Lulu has inspired three plays, Alban Berg's famous opera, several film versions and numerous stage adaptions. In this version Lulu will be played by Judy Davis, winner of two British Academy Awards for her recent performance in the motion picture MY BRILLIANT CAREER.

Sydney season at the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House
presented by the Sydney Theatre Company

TO PROVIDE A FOCAL POINT— CAPPA

by Wayne Maddern

Wayne Maddern — Executive Director of CAPPA

At the instigation of the Theatre Board, CAPPA (Confederation of Australian Professional Performing Arts Ltd) was born in Canberra in late 1979 as a direct result of separate visits to the United States by both Bob Adams, Director of the Theatre Board and Alan Edwards, Director of the Queensland Theatre Company. It was there that at separate times they closely examined the operation of the New York based Theatre Communications Group, an organisation on which CAPPA is loosely based. After those visits, Peter Zeisler, Director of TCG was invited by the Theatre Board to Australia, where he presided over meetings of interested company representatives in most states. Resolutions were passed at these meetings supporting the setting up of a similar organisation thus, the meeting in Canberra and the election of a small steering committee which guided CAPPA to the election of a Board representing five Australian states and the disciplines of Drama, Dance, Music, Mime and Puppetry.

CAPPA is primarily a service organisation which aims to safeguard the financial basis of member companies, provide the basis for a dialogue between member companies, develop cost reducing and shared services and provide a national voice for member companies.

CAPPA is self-supporting with a membership of twenty five companies. In the near future criteria will be set for non-voting associate membership at a nominal fee. At present full members pay membership dues based on their gross income. The range is from $100 a year for companies with a gross income of less than $75,000 to $2,000 for companies with an income in excess of $2 million.

CAPPA's operation is to some degree limited by its present budget which is on the lower side of $20,000. High on CAPPA's list of priorities is the appointment of a Research Officer to acquire the type of statistics needed to effectively communicate member companies and also to monitor any State and Federal legislation affecting the arts. A further priority is to establish a pool of specialists in all operative aspects of the performing arts available to any member company seeking professional expertise of the highest calibre. It is proposed to disseminate information relating to salary levels, private sector funding, job vacancies, market research and publications of relevance.

The national lobby on matters affecting the well-being of the performing arts is high on our list of priorities. Already CAPPA has mounted a federal campaign on the matter of sales tax payable on the manufacture of sets and properties.

At present CAPPA is the only one of many existing disparate organisations which has been able to mount an effective national lobby. The strength of a large unified group of performing arts companies has proven to be surprisingly effective.

The arts, for many years have been low on everybody's list of priorities and while this situation continues, a low profile is maintained precluding any real advancement in funding, ideas and development. Concessions previously available to arts organisations have been lost with barely a whimper from the victims. CAPPA intends that this attitude will be quickly and effectively changed to bring the performing arts forward into the eighties as a vocal and effective group with a say in the management of the arts in this country.

CAPPA will provide a focal point for the arts. A point from where the CAPPA representative can speak authoritatively on behalf of all represented companies and by maintaining a dialogue with members, the details of a successful achievement in one state can be documented and circulated as a prototype for others. The time is ripe for such an innovation.

Shortly CAPPA will announce the establishment of an annual award to honour an individual or area of the profession in a sphere that normally attracts little support or attention.

State Governments will be encouraged to provide a stronger, more aggressive voice on federal matters which directly affect the operation of performing arts companies. Money needed to fund many of CAPPA's proposed projects will be sought through channels other than governmental thus maintaining CAPPA's independent status.

The Theatre Board is to be commended for being instrumental in the setting up of an organisation which will be critically appraising the Board's own policies and operation.

SPOTLIGHT

LOVE STORY

AT THE PLAYBOX

Bernice Rubens — author of I Sent A Letter To My Love

by Cathy Peake

"Love comes hard on the heels of success" says the press statement. And the first production this year in the main theatre at the Playbox — *I Sent A Letter To My Love* by award winning novelist Bernice Rubens — is indeed the first in their series of plays about love. The "success", no doubt is in reference to their recent season of *The Choir* at the Universal.

It is directed by Malcolm Robertson, who has just completed a successful return season of *Judgement*, and its cast is comprised of Robin Cuming, Caroline Gillmer, Peter Cummins, Gerda Nicolson and Adele Lewin.

Talking about the new play one week prior to its opening, Robertson likened its subject to that of *The Day After The Fair* and to *Annie Storey* — a play he directed many years ago, and which dealt with the problems of a woman alone in a highly restricted colonial setting.

"*I Sent A Letter To My Love* is a love story, but it is much more than that," he said.

"When I first read it, I was fascinated by the way in which Bernice Rubens was able to capture the quality of the lives of a group of people in a small and idiosyncratic society — all of them suffering from the effects of both personal and religious repression.

"It is not a sentimental play. Nor is it the pink and white sugar love of conventional soap opera. It is much tougher than that. Rubens appears to be quite unafraid to explore the basic fragility of human relationships — something which is often rejected in our theatre today."

I Sent A Letter To My Love first opened at the Long Wharf Theatre, Newhaven — one of the best regional theatres in the US. This was followed by a season at the Greenwich Theatre in London in 1980 where it found a mixed reaction among the critics.

Set in the 1970s in a tiny Welsh seaside village dominated by bigotry and the chapel, the play is an examination of love, pain and relationships in a society that is censorious of the passions and most forms of their expression. But Robertson feels that much of the criticism of the play stems from the currently unfashionable strengths with which the plot and storyline are developed.

"It has such a strong story-line that it leaves itself open to criticism as being old-fashioned" he says. "And to say what it is about, does make it sound like a novelette."

Undaunted, he is warm in his defence of its subtlety and the enormous scope he feels it offers in production.

I Sent A Letter To My Love is Bernice Rubens' first play after a long and distinguished career as a novelist. Born in Cardiff, she has been writing successfully since 1960 and won the Booker Prize for fiction for *The Elected Member* in 1970. Last year, Moshe Mizrahi made a film of her play in France with Simone Signoret playing the main role as Amy.

Her background as a novelist makes itself felt in the script, and in preparation for its Melbourne season, Robertson says he has had to edit some of the over-descriptive passages.

He sees Rubens' dialogue as being simply the "tip of the iceberg", as one tenth above the surface of a world of jangled nerves and frayed social conventions.

"The dialogue is not really the main substance of the play" he adds. "Most of the time the dialogue is very mundane. Directing *I Sent A Letter To My Love* has been a fascinating exercise in working with what lies behind the dialogue."

Shortly afterwards, directing *I Sent A Letter To My Love* Malcolm Robertson left Melbourne to play opposite Judy Davis in Wedekind's *Lulu* which opens in Adelaide at the State Theatre Company and will go on to the Sydney Opera House.

THE **ELLIS** COLUMN

I lie abed with a flu of the sort that lightly turns your thoughts to suicide. All may be well. But doubts abound like the virus in my nose and bowels. I worry as theatres empty and video units proliferate that our liveliest art, the Australian stage, is in deadly peril. It may be the weather, or my present ague, or transmuted grief at Labor's yellow-bellied salvage of the wicked Malcolm Fraser in the Peacock debate last week, but I fear the worst.

It seems to me that we have writers of genius now (Stephen Sewell, the latterday Dottie Hewett, the shyly blossoming George Hutchison, the perennial Peter Kenna) and not enough places to put them in cities where the seven thousandth production of *Hamlet* crazily takes precedence over the first production of the next *Hard God*. Worse than that, we have writers of raw green promise and writers of richly autumnal competence (Michael Cove, Dennis Whitburn, John Upton, John Stone, Phillip Ryall, Rodney Milgate, Alma Lee Green, Ron Blair, Dave Allen) with nowhere to go but the deeps of middle age. Williamson apart (and his case is so bound up with luck and politics and physical altitude as to yield no drawable moral) no playwright, however good in the past, can be assured of that thing most needed for his growth: a place to get his next bad play put on where he may learn from it.

It seems to me as well that many actors of the first rank, lured by the thousand dollars a day and more that they can filch from the present Gadarene rush of tax dodge movies, are leaving the stage forever, while whingeing, with ample cause, that the two hundred and fifty dollars or so the Nimrod pays a week for the finest flower of their art is barely enough to starve on. So what we have instead is honourable actors of the second rank interpreting the virgin work of new writers that ten years ago would have had on tap Max Phipps, Don Crosby, Helen Morse, Chris Haywood and Gary McDonald, amazing us with how much could be made of how little.

So I dread, or I somewhat dread, what is now to come: a cowardly shrinking back into *Hamlet* and Chekhov and Simon Gray and Stoppard, who [illegible] need like a hole in the scrotum, and a cruel choking off of the national genius that is ours for the price of ten dollars a seat.

To blame, as always, are those tax-fed midget entrepreneurs who would rather follow and precedent into the classical desert than seek fresh pastures of honourable risk in the country of their birth. To blame, as well, are the audiences that stay at home and watch *I Claudius* for free, or go to a morning session of *Superman II* for half the cost of a back row seat at a *Hamlet* not worth seeing.

But not so much to blame. The lessons of the past have not been learned — that original Australian plays, rumbustious and raw with music and big casts, bring in big audiences, where blandly delivered classics, or British originals of bourgeois intent with tiny casts do not. A theatre audience does not like being sold short. When they are not sold short, as they were not in *The Man From Muckinupin*, whole Opera Houses fill with proudly delighted Australians, undergoing recognition. Australian playwrights are doing their job, as they always have, for less remuneration than anyone else on earth. It is the good actors who are truanting in favour of silly roles in dood [illegible] blockbusters, and the tax-fed entrepreneurs, as always, who are the Quislings of our liveliest art and should be lined up against the wall and shot. There is no time any more to waste the good that is there, and withering on the vine.

Gordon Chater

— back for *The Dresser* but not for good.

Chater before he left Australia in Nimrod's production of The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin

by Lucy Wagner

In January 1978 Gordon Chater left Australia for an international tour of Steve J Spears' controversial, one-man play *The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin*. Three and a half years later he has returned for a limited season of the commercially successful, English play *The Dresser*, in which he will play Sir, an aging actor-manager giving his last performance during the war.

Chater went straight to London from Sydney and opened *Benjamin Franklin* there in February '78. It received excellent reviews, two critics calling it "a great play" and played for 5½ months at the Mayfair Theatre. From there the production travelled to San Francisco and opened there that October.

The San Francisco critics were ecstatic, giving better notices than any in Australia or London, but audiences didn't come and after two days the notice to close went up. Belief in the show was so great, however, that the promoters got onto the media to tell them their notices had had no effect, the reviewers castigated the public for not going to see the show and within four days *Elocution* was playing to capacity houses. It played out its full 13 weeks.

New York was unfortunately not such a success. With a bad theatre — almost in Hell's Kitchen and the one where Barry Humphries had met his demise — even kind reviews couldn't attract more than 60% audiences, and no Broadway show can afford to play to less than 80% average. When it came off after four weeks in April 1979, though, Chater had fallen in love

with the Big Apple, and waited there, hoping to get his green card for resident actor status

He was surprised and delighted when it came through, and the first job to come up was a regional production of a new play by Thom Thomas called *The Interview*, which he played with Kier Dullea. Gordon Chater was hailed as "the discovery of the year" and the producers wanted to take it to Broadway. Chater's agent insisted that he have a Broadway contract, so although Dullea became tied up with film work and backers weren't forthcoming, he was lavishly paid for two weeks work without even appearing.

It was after this that for the first time Gordon Chater had to face the American audition process.

"No one in Australia has any idea of what it's like. Everyone except real superstars audition. By law any member of Equity can audition so there are huge Equity auditions and then other ones that you get through having a good agent. The last audition I did was in 1946 so I was traumatic about it, and slightly arrogant. I felt 'Oh really, me auditioning, at my age', but I got over that and started to take it all seriously as the American actors do."

Nonetheless, it was a strange sensation to find himself at first auditions with "about 100 to 150 Chater clones, all about 60 with grey hair, some with and some without moustaches, potbellies, mostly pompous."

Working for auditions payed off, though, and Chater picked from among five offers the role of the Judge in the national tour of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* with Michael Moriarty — "because it payed the best". Moriarty then asked him to join his company for a production of *Richard III* — "because he thought my American accent was good enough for Shakespeare by then" — and he played Lord Stanley in Empire clothes with a New York accent.

It was while he was back with the second national tour of *Whose Life*... that negotiations were started for *The Dresser*.

Chater and entrepreneur Wilton Morley both read *The Dresser* at the same time and their enthusiastic letters crossed in the post. Morley offered the role of Sir, with Warren Mitchell as his dresser and Chater, wanting to come home and see friends, felt it would be an excellent vehicle for him to return in. However it wasn't easy to persuade him to leave New York, and negotiations were fairly protracted.

Gordon Chater has not returned to Australia for good, on the contrary, the season of *The Dresser* is specifically limited, playing for six weeks in Sydney and then a further six in Melbourne from July 7. He is anxious to return to the States.

"It is very stimulating to be working in such a vast industry, and it really is an *industry*. In Manhattan there are 200 theatres working every night. Overall there is such a striving for perfection, there are endless resources for the theatre and no expense is spared. Although there is little government subsidy there is great distinction to be earned for backers and producers — people don't mind making money, but they don't mind losing it either."

The opportunities and rewards are enormous and the very business-like structure of the industry impresses him. For the comparatively small part of the Judge in *Whose Life*..., Chater was payed $1,000 a week and lived on his weekly touring per diem of $315.

For Gordon Chater the whole attitude to theatre professionals is different in America. "Even the smallest bit part is treated like royalty — forced by the unions of course. The minimum weekly wage is $475 but no one except the youngest understudy would work for that. When an actor finishes a run he immediately signs up at the Unemployment Office and receives $126 per week for six months or until he finds his next job. Actors have health and dentistry insurance and pension funds in all the unions."

It is not only the theatre industry that attracts Chater to New York; he finds it immensely stimulating to be able to see such a wide variety of theatre, film and television and to be involved in such a multi-national, multi-faceted society. He feels he has come home to an Australia "almost as absurdly nationalistic as Canada" and hopes the country will not reveal its immaturity by condemning *The Dresser* as too English and therefore irrelevant to Australians. To him the play has a universal theme, it is a "wonderful, simple, clear statement about relationships. And a clean play too" he adds, commenting that people seem to be sick of bad language these days. It certainly is a change from the days of *Elocution of Benjamin Franklin*.

Chater went straight into rehearsals as soon as he arrived in Australia, feeling the play would need all the work the cast could give it — "There's a lot of tricky timing, especially in Act Two, but I'm sure we'll be able to make it work, with the help of Rodney Fisher. Warren will be marvellous of course."

He has not yet been able to see much Sydney theatre. Of what he has managed to get to he has found that "the Music Loft is as good as ever, excellent entertainment", but was very disappointed with the Australian production of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*

"It was depressing, a lot of splendid actors not properly directed — and I've seen all the international productions except the one with Richard Thomas. I was shocked that the Elizabethan Theatre Trust had allowed this — and also that they had only provided half the set that is standard in every production all over the world. Perhaps I'm too close to the play, but the court scene, that I've played over 300 times, was always greeted at the judgement by cheers and rounds of applause. Here one couldn't have cared less and I blame the directors."

Gordon Chater has to be back in New York by November 1, though he won't say for what, fearing to tempt providence. He hopes to get the standby for *The Dresser* there though, it wouldn't be mounted with a star of any lesser stature than Alec Guiness, Robert Morley or Tom Courtenay and to be a standby for them is not a mere understudy, but acknowledgement that you are capable of playing the role, but don't have the star billing.

Will he come back to Australia permanently? "Not yet. I still see in my mind that little house on the beach in Northern Queensland — but then again I'm not sure that actors can just retire, even if they can afford to. Just at the moment I'm enjoying New York very much and quite frankly I'd prefer to gamble on getting full time work there than here at the moment."

JIM SHARMAN
ON **LULU** AND BEYOND

Jim Sharman

Judy Davis — the new Lulu

by Michael Morley

Jim Sharman is an interviewer's delight and nightmare in one: the first because he is fluent, open and engaging; the second because someone who can keep so many juggler's balls and ideas in the air at once leaves the more pedestrian of us (like this interviewer) somewhat bemused and struggling to keep up.

Not that the effort isn't worthwhile or exhilarating, for undoubtedly, one of his great abilities is a capacity to inspire enthusiasm in his co-workers, as well as the ability to communicate his interests and energies. By chance, I spoke to him the very day his appointment as artistic director of the State Theatre Company, SA, for the next three years was announced. The interview was originally intended to cover his production of Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, but inevitably expanded to include questions relating to his plans for the Company, while taking in anecdotes and snatches of conversation in turn witty and instructive about Brecht, Joseph Losey, Isherwood or Patrick White. Name-dropping? Not a bit of it: the comments had to do with views on the theatre, the approach to performance, the writer's picture of himself, the question of choosing a repertoire.

The choice of *Lulu*, for instance, was his. "I had seen the opera and the Pabst film and been aware of the play for some time. *Lulu* was one of the plays I'd earlier discussed with Richard Wherrett when he was looking at the repertoire question for his company. Of course, Berg's opera is very much to the fore at present, now that the full three-act version is available. There's been productions at the Paris Opera, at the Met, at Covent Garden, and Losey will be doing it in Vienna. To my knowledge, the two plays (*Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*) that make up the *Lulu* complex have never been done particularly successfully outside Germany, and I'd also been looking for some time to work with Louis Nowra so that when I approached him with the question of doing an adaptation he was more than willing to involve himself in it, having had a fascination for Wedekind's work."

To Australian audiences, the name of Frank Wedekin (1864-1918) probably suggests little. Yet he is one of the most distinctive voices in 20th Century European theatre, an author who shocked society with his revolutionary social and sexual attitudes. He was

imprisoned for lese-majeste — he had written a poem satirising the Kaiser's trip to the Holy Lands — and productions of the *Lulu* plays and of his *Spring's Awakening* ran into trouble with the censors. Moreover, even in death, he continued with his ability to create a furore. At his funeral, the poet Heinrich Lautensack jumped into the grave and insisted on being buried with Wedekind's coffin. It was only with great difficulty that he was removed from the cemetery and eventually marched off to end his days in an asylum! The young Brecht was an enthusiastic admirer of Wedekind as, indeed, is Nowra.

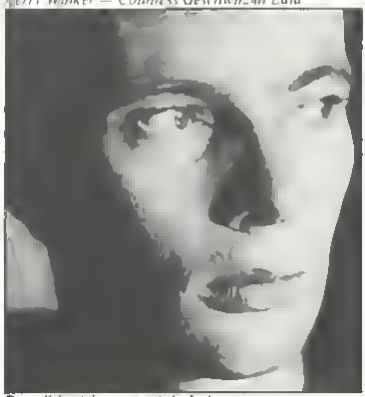
Given that Peter Barnes' version of the *Lulu* plays was already available, why was it not being used? "The Barnes version is awful, unfaithful, and totally lacking in the power of the original. What's more, given that an audience is not going to sit through two evenings of Wedekind, and that the two plays were originally one, it's not so difficult to contract it back into its initial shape. Louis has also spread his net a bit wider, so that the reference points for the script are the two original plays as well as Wedekind's own *Death and the Devil*, Pabst's screenplay, Berg's libretto and some Wedekind cabaret songs." Does this expansion of the play's context tend to obscure what it is really about? "I don't think so. It's part of the way of defining it. What I've come to understand the play to be about is the process of human relationships, and that when people meet they tend to see something in the other person which is, in fact, a reflection of themselves. And then, when they discover the rest, they either cope or are destroyed — usually the latter. Lulu is the unconscious catalyst in all this. Wedekind himself said she should be like 'love's sleepwalker'. In a sense, she's more of an idea than a person — though, of course, you can't play an idea; you have to play a person."

How does the performer approach that particularly knotty problem? "I think that anyone undertaking the role would become aware of this — most obviously in that the character changes so radically from scene to scene. How successful this intellectual notion is realised on stage is ultimately the success of the production."

So much for the core of the play, and the nature of the central character. My

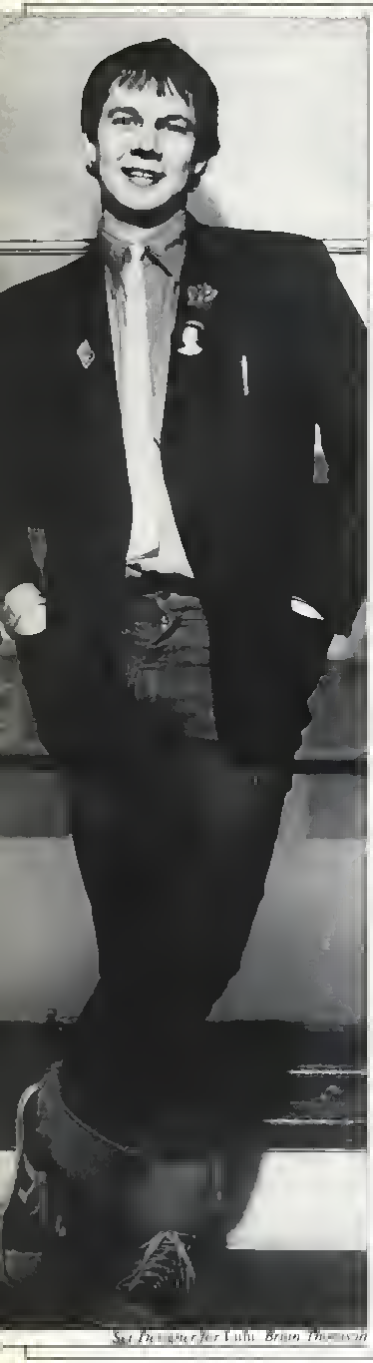
Costume designer Richard Tritch

Kerry Walker — Countess Geschwitz in Lulu



Russell Kiefel — part of the Lulu cast

Robert Grubb — playing in Lulu



Set Designer for Lulu: Brian Thomson

next question — concerning Sharman's attitude to the Pabst film and Chereau's Paris production of the opera — was somewhat tentative, given that directors, like poets, tend to resent the attribution of the influence of others. But his rejoinder cut off the question in mid-stream. "Have I been influenced? Obviously. The only real influence, however, is that I have set it in that period, as opposed to any of the others I could have chosen. It's a bit immaterial where you set it, provided it's got a 'boom to bust' economic climate round it. On the other hand, I'm not particularly interested in the consistency of period in the design: touches of modernity seem appropriate, as do touches from an earlier period. After all, Jack the Ripper is clearly a Victorian figure, whereas I don't see any reason why Schwarz, the painter, shouldn't be like a sixties photographer."

But, in the last analysis, it is the characters of Lulu herself and, to a lesser extent, of Dr Schon that will hold any production together. Sharman had been strongly affected by Theresa Stratas' performance in Paris, and also by Louise Brooks' reading of the role in the film version. "But I can't really now remember any specific details. The two performances were totally different and I'm sure ours — or, rather, Judy's — will be, as well." He concurred with my comment about the riveting combination of innocence and sensuality in Louise Brooks' performance but added: "However, it was very much disliked at the time. The Germans were really upset at this American actress trying to play 'our' Lulu! A silly response, though I suspect Actors' Equity in Australia would be rather sympathetic to it — to their discredit."

He has two fairly modest aims for the prodution. "The patterning of the relationships is crucial. I see Lulu at the centre, with Dr Schon on one side and Geschwitz — who really takes over from him in the second half — on the other. And the second thing I would hope for is to do justice to Louis' adaptation, to its poetry. I want to give it air to breathe in. I feel that audiences now seek poetry in productions — albeit in a rather quiet way."

So much, for the time being, for *Lulu*. What about the new position as director of the STC? "The plans at present are still fairly loose. It was very important to have Louis coming as resident dramatist, in that he can contribute not only in terms of his own work and adaptations but in the choice of repertoire and the running of the company. And, rather than beginning with a set of definite ideas and policies, I want to encourage a group of people with particular abilities and interests. By bringing them together, I hope to allow their contribution to lead to the evolution of a policy over the first year. Both Louis and I are sympathetic to large-scale productions, to the use of music in the productions, so we'll be setting up a core of twelve performers and three musicians. We'll also be concentrating our activities on the Playhouse, which I think is a magnificent facility: and we'll be doing seven productions in the first year which will remain in the Company's repertoire — if they're good. Obviously, if they aren't good, there'd be no point in reviving them."

Clearly, it's early days yet for final decisions about the choice of programme but both Sharman and Nowra are interested in the German repertoire, and we'll probably be seeing at least one or two plays from this area, rectifying a serious gap in the Playhouse's programme over the last five years. The setting up of the Company will come during the latter half of this year, when the question of guest directors and designers will also be looked at.

Sharman has firm views on the roles of the designer and the director, feeling in particular that there is something radically wrong with design in the Australian theatre. He would like to look outside the conventional sources of design into the area of painters and sculptors who have a sense of theatre. And there is too much emphasis in Australia on the function of the director as a teacher. "In England, the actor doesn't expect to be taught how to play the role, whereas in too many cases here in Australia the Australian actor expects to be taught how to deliver a performance. I see the function of the director more in terms of interpretation, mise-en-scene, overall realisation of the piece. On the other hand, there are actors who are now bringing more authority to their roles — and that is marvellous — there should be more of it. After all, you don't go to the theatre to see directors, you go to see actors."

LOUIS NOWRA

on translating and adapting

LULU

in interview with Michael Morley

Peter Barnes had, of course, already done a version of the two Lulu *plays. What were your feelings about his adaptation?*

I don't like what he did to *Lulu*. Barnes to me is Bohemian and I think the adaptation has to be a little bit more vigorous and lucid. A simple Bohemian delight in sex, lewdness and immorality isn't really what's called for.

What prompted your interest in Wedekind and in doing the Lulu *adaptation?*

I've been interested in him for some time. In 1976, I lived for a year in Munich in Schwabing (the artistic and Bohemian area), where he had been a considerable figure during his lifetime. I'd also been working on a project to translate some of his cabaret songs and I'd always wanted to do *Spring's Awakening*. So, when Jim Sharman suggested *Lulu*, he found a receptive audience. The sheer bulk of the *Lulu* material was, however, one of the reasons I'd never tackled the play earlier. One is immediately struck by the unwieldiness of it all: you feel that there's a play in there somewhere, but it just has to be ferreted out. One of the reasons for this ungainliness is, I think, that Wedekind has a peculiar inability to combine drawing-room drama with epic melodrama, and some of the endless conversation scenes tend to ruin the impact of the other scenes.

Are you saying that Wedekind lacked a sense of structure?

In this play, perhaps. It's very strange really, as *Spring's Awakening* is a very taut, tight piece: apart from *King Kong*, it's probably his best crafted play. I sometimes wonder whether one of the reasons for *Lulu*'s unwieldiness is that he was so *personally* caught up in the theme that he couldn't see the play clearly enough as a *craftsman*.

In trying to fashion the two plays into a manageable shape, what was your principal concern? Did you cut, or omit scenes, or concentrate on paring down the dialogue?

What I've tried to do is to pare away irrelevancies in terms of the dialogue. Some of the extended conversations are too elaborate and wordy. One reason why we cut away some of the excess language was to maintain the brutality of the way the people communicate, their bluntness and straightforwardness, the lack of reserve. This does not mean that the characters speak as openly about sex and morality as, for instance, contemporary characters would: we're still concerned with suppression and repression. Moreover, Wedekind's approach to character doesn't allow the sort of portrayal in which further layers of the individual characters are subsequently revealed. One of the things about the play is that you know the characters very quickly. Even when Wedekind tries to build up the character later on, nothing really is added to it. One of the play's main faults, also, is that it's tremendously indulgent, so that one really needs to function in places as an editor.

This problem about the character being fixed: this surely creates difficulties for the writer, in that the way he shows development has to be different. Does Wedekind, for example, do this by throwing Lulu into a series of new situations?

Well, the play is really a great piece of anti-naturalism. With a Chekhov play, for example, what happens is that the character is gradually disclosed as the play proceeds in an oblique fashion. Now, obviously Wedekind can't stand this, so he presents the character immediately, who is then confronted with new situations so that some development in the *narrative* results.

Did you find yourself in some sense restricted by the necessity of working closely with another author's characters and attitudes? Did you feel you had the necessary flexibility, or did you want, for example, to send the characters in different directions?

Working on a straight translation — as in the case of *Cyrano* — it is definitely easier. My original draft for *Lulu* was certainly freer than the draft we have now. But I feel that the adaptor's responsibility is rather like that of the actor vis-a-vis the character he's playing. Or, if you like, it's a bit like being a handmaiden to a bride: there's a certain duty you have to perform, but you can't replace the bride. And, just as the actor cannot make a moral comment on the character he is impersonating, so too the adaptor shouldn't twist Wedekind's viewpoint. I certainly don't want to end up assuming the sort of position of writing the sort of adaptation that Marowitz does. That seems to me remarkably silly.

Louis Nowra. Photo: Branca Gotta

A Unique Approach

Director, Ian Watson looks at the progress of the NSW Theatre of the Deaf.

Colin Allen and Rosemary Lenzo in The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson

The NSW Theatre of the Deaf is just over two years old as a professional theatre company and in that time a great deal has been achieved — and, because progress inevitably broadens the potential and scope, a great deal more now seems realistically achievable

In 1979 the emphasis in our TIE work was on the capability of the deaf actor The Education Department and school system generally had very little contact with deaf people and deaf theatre, so people had to be made aware that deaf theatre was not simply handicapped theatre but that the people involved were highly skilled and talented and could compete on a professional level with actors who were not so handicapped

For this reason the initial productions did not concern themselves so much with questions of deafness and other so called educative elements, but rather concentrated on displaying skills accessible to the audiences for which they were performing This seemed to achieve its aim, so much so that by 1980 the Company no longer had to struggle to be recognised and obtain performance bookings — now it could concentrate on productions directly related to its raison d'etre, namely deafness, and educate audiences about aspects of it through its unique approach to theatre

Our plays designed for young children, namely *The Shshsh Journey* and *Theodore*, have laid their educative emphasis on involving the audience in certain aspects of deafness Through the medium of the plays the children are introduced to, and encouraged to join in, exploring the manual alphabet, visual gesture and sign language In *The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson*, designed for Senior High Schools, the emphasis is on a production content wherein the story deals with the concept of a deaf hero — the deaf person who integrates into society and proves a great success in it This non-involvement of the audience approach has been chosen because the Company has found High School audiences similarly conditioned to adults (and in fact *The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson* has been performed very successfully for adult audiences in a theatre season the Company mounted at the Stables Theatre earlier this year), namely that they want to be entertained, talked *to* rather than become directly involved *in* the action, ie they are passive receivers

The Company consists of two parts,

the full-time professional core and a much larger part-time group. The part-time group was the origin of the professional company and continues to be the training ground for future professional deaf actors. In our theatre seasons these groups combine, providing a large pool of deaf actors, which does cause problems related to the differing degress of skill, talent and experience of the various actors, but does equally provide a greater degree of scope in the productions mounted.

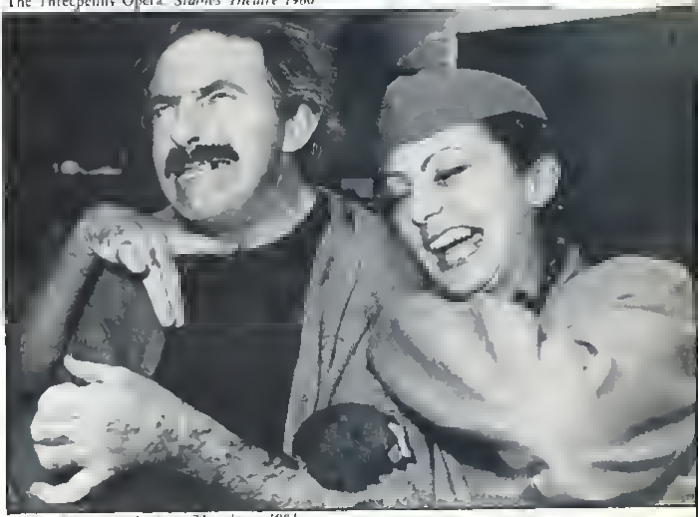
In all our theatre productions, as with our TIE, deaf and hearing actors work together incorporating sign language, visuality, music, songs and the spoken word to allow our work the greatest possible access to the widest possible audience. Approximately 85% of our theatre audiences are hearing and mostly unfamiliar with sign language, but this in no way limits their understanding and enjoyment of our work because of the integration of verbal and visual theatre skills. Equally our deaf audiences have unimpared access to all our material — an obviously essential element in any theatre of the deaf.

Since 1979 the Company has mounted four major seasons, the first was *Double Act* at the Stables Theatre — which included the Company's first one-man show with David London called *A History In Six Sides*, Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* at the Cell Block Theatre that included trained opera singers and professional musicians. *Hamlet* was an entirely deaf cast and only one hearing narrator, directed by the Company's deaf Assistant Artistic Director, Nola Colefax and *Pictures Words and Other Signs* at the Stables Theatre in February of this year. This production consisted entirely of original material, either group devised, or written by the Company's Writer-in-Residence Ingle Knight.

Last year I travelled overseas on a study tour of Deaf Theatres in America, Britain and Europe on a grant from the Australia Council. I learnt many things on this tour, the details of which are fully documented in my report (obtainable at the offices of the Theatre of the Deaf), however the single most important factor I had quoted to me was that the one unique element in Deaf Theatre is sign language. Hearing actors employ mime, visuality etc, but they cannot employ sign language — and audiences, both deaf and hearing in our experience and those overseas companies, respond to the use of sign language.

The New South Wales Theatre of the Deaf can, I feel, offer the community two major things. Firstly an understanding of the deaf, their world and their talents and secondly an exploration of the potentials of theatrical form through the unique combination of visual and verbal language. Certainly the Company has its concerns: two more professional deaf actors would allow a greater scope for our work and let us explore further the potentials of deaf theatre, and the education of the deaf in Australia, which is poor relative to that in the USA. Meanwhile the Company continues to tour Sydney and further afield with its two TIE productions, and is in rehearsal for a most exciting challenge - a production of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* which is being co-directed by Nola Colefax and myself. The production will be mounted in the Stables Theatre in July.

The Threepenny Opera, *Stables Theatre 1980*



Junior School production, Theodore *1981*

INTERNATIONAL

China's new flowering

by Leonard Radic

Late last year, while on a month-long visit to China to look at theatre there, I found myself at a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in Shanghai The company had been working on the production solidly for eight months — yes, eight months — and they were understandably proud of their efforts

One of the features of the production was its decor Most modern Chinese plays use simple naturalistic sets which under the low lights, look flat and unimaginative But for Shakespeare the designer decided something more ambitious was called for And so he produced a set which made use of mechanically operated sliding panels to keep the action flowing

When the panel moved the first time there was a gasp from the audience But when Juliet's bed, which had previously been tucked away at the rear of the stage moved forward towards the audience, apparently of its own accord, they stood up to get a better look Quite obviously, they had never seen anything like it When it happened a second and then a third time, they again stood up to look Only then did they settle back and concentrate on the play itself

I mention the incident simply because it seemed to say so much about the state of theatre in China at the moment On the one hand the Chinese are handicapped by their lack of knowledge and experience of theatre styles and theatre production methods elsewhere On the other hand, they have a passionate eagerness to learn

The so-called Cultural Revolution, and the destructive negativism that went with it, is now well and truly a thing of the past The four years between the arrest of the Gang of four and their showpiece trial last November has seen a new flowering of the arts in China

The eight model works approved by Jiang Qing have slipped from the repertoire perhaps never to return — at least in their original form As one director said to me "These model works had their good points But after eight or ten years even the best opera, play or ballet gets to be a bore Audiences like variety"

And variety they now have Since 1976 thousands of theatre people — previously silenced, banished or put to work on farms or in non-creative posts have returned to the fold Plans that were downed for years have been taken up again Old skills are being relearned, old works are being restaged

As a result Chinese audiences can now enjoy a wide range of theatre, all the way from the traditional richly costumed Peking and regional operas which have delighted generations of Chinese theatregoers through to puppetry, acrobats, dance dramas, *hua chu* or dialogue plays, and the occasional play from abroad (For example, *Pygmalion Macbeth*, the *Romeo and Juliet* I saw, and *Galileo*)

A keen interest in western drama is one by-product of the post-Cultural Revolutionary period A resurgence in the field of opera is another Works which were banned from performance because they were deemed to be "subversive" or "reactionary" have been taken off the shelf again, dusted down, and restaged in all their traditional splendour

In China, as in Australia the audience for opera is mostly middle-aged and elderly, except in Shanghai where the highly romantic local style of opera known as *shao xing* has a keen following among the young, and in the provinces where the audiences are sometimes made up almost entirely of peasants

A night with a people's audience — and I had four of them in Xian — is a memorable experience The audience comes to the theatre on bicycles or herded into open trucks They have

Cantonese comedy opera Shi Qian Goes Downhill *Photo Therese Radic*

come from farms and communes, some as far away as 45 km, and are intent on having a good night out

Dressed in a uniform of blue trousers, padded blue or grey jackets, Mao caps and sandshoes, they sit through the performance wide-eyed and attentive, giggling at the romantic bits, laughing uproariously at the broadly comic ones, and turning round to stare at the two westerners in the audience to see if they are doing likewise They have paid the equivalent of 50 or 60 cents for their night at the opera, and their grinning, weather-beaten faces tell me they have got their money's worth

One day television will reach their [illegible] villages, and Peking Opera will have lost its peasant audience. Meantime they are amongst its most fervent and enthusiastic supporters.

Kingdom, the villain of the piece was a civil engineer who had misappropriated vital drilling equipment for his own use By so doing he had jeopardised the lives of a group of workers engaged in building a tunnel beneath a river

In another, *A Flower Late in Blooming*, which I saw in Canton, the villain of the piece was a young postgraduate student who is revealed in the dying moments of the play as a fraud who has built up his academic reputation on papers filched from the estate of a noble worker's father

In each case the exposure of fraud brought with it loud applause from the predominantly young audience There [illegible] problem in identifying the goodies from the baddies They were as obvious as in a Western or a Victorian melodrama

age of 25 Its heroine was a young boutique owner nicknamed "Charlie" who dressed smartly and urged others to do the same

The play was an unashamed plea for a more interesting, more colourful, more aesthetically satisfying life At one stage Charlie says "We must try to change the image of China as being a country of blue ants " At another point she rounds on her father — an old fashioned party functionary — and tells him he should be helping, not hindering, the march towards modernisation Out with drabness, in with beauty and romanticism – that's her philosophy

It is easy to be cynical about these modern plays and dismiss them as idealistic melodramas They are idealistic melodramas They are idealistic and they are melodramatic But they also take their subject matter from the lives of those around them, and they speak to their audiences in accents that they clearly understand They have, in short, that quality that our theatre is always talking about but often fails to achieve, relevance

I said at the beginning that the Chinese have a passionate curiosity about western life, and theatre people about western theatre Unfortunately for them, very few have travelled outside China, and their knowledge of western production styles and methods is limited to the occasional film or television show

In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, some of the east had seen the Old Vic's *Hamlet* with Derek Jacobi, which played in Peking and Shanghai before going on to Australia Otherwise their only contact with Shakespeare in production had been the Olivier films and several Russian films

The heavy, emotive Russian style was evident in the Shanghai production — though the Chinese added one ingredient of their own. They gave the play a happy ending The climax saw the star-cross'd lovers locked tableau-style in one another's arms up on the balcony where they had embraced so daringly — daringly by Chinese standards, that is The Shanghaians are notorious romantics, and they couldn't abide the notion of the two young lovers being eternally separated

The Chinese curiosity about the

Peking Opera Li Huimiang (The Goddess of Revenge) *Photo There y Rosin*

Hua chu is the other theatrical form which has proliferated in the post-Cultural Revolutionary climate It is the Chinese equivalent of our dialogue play, and is acted in a naturalistic style with natural make-up and modern dress

Unlike the operas which are set almost always in China's imperial past — even those which are being written today — the dialogue dramas draw their themes and inspirations from contemporary life

By western standards they are old-fashioned and "Ibsenish", stressing as they do the themes of duty, responsibility and idealism Corruption, particularly on the part of State officials, is a recurrent theme So is western decadence Enemies of the people, in one form or another, abound

In one play that I saw in Peking, for example, *The Dawn of the Shadi*

Interestingly, each of the *hua chu* plays that I saw contained at least one character obsessed with "decadent" western life The symbols of this decadence was seen variously as smart fashionable clothes, Gordon's gin, a private car, loud transistorised music, and in one case, a proclivity for strip-tease ("Everybody's doing it in Los Angeles," the young man, Chinese-born but American-educated said in a crude attempt at wooing a shy Cantonese girl).

But where the Peking and Canton plays took an unsympathetic view of Western life and its superficially attractive but basically hollow temptations, another modern play which I saw in Shanghai, *Forget-Me-Not*, did the opposite

This was a play written by two women for the Shanghai Youth Theatre a company whose audience is made up mostly of those under the

West means that any westerner who comes their way is assailed with questions. In both Peking and Shanghai I was asked to conduct a seminar on Australian drama for the benefit of writers, actors and directors.

They were polite when told about the sex and violence in some Australian plays, expressed some interest in the work of the APG and Romeril's *The Floating World*, were totally baffled at the Beckettian notion of an absurd and meaningless world, and only pricked up their ears with real interest when I explained our system of rehearsed readings and workshop productions for new plays.

If our Foreign Affairs department is really interested in cultural exchanges with China, one of the worthwhile things it could do would be to send a few experienced actor-directors — good ones, not hacks — to China to work with companies in the major cities and to pass on some of the technical expertise and know-how. Give them long enough there and they could work wonders.

Leonard Radic, theatre critic for the *Melbourne Age*, visited China as a guest of the Chinese Dramatists' Association and with the help of the Australia-China Council.

U.K.

Revivals and adaptations

by Irving Wardle

No new plays this month, but it would take a smart observer to work that out from the saris, business suits, Caribbean carnival gear, and Rockette deshabille that have lately been adorning the works of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Aristophanes.

First the good news. Max Stafford Clark's production of *The Seagull*, which marks the English Stage Company's twenty-fifth anniversary at the Royal Court, and exhibits the oft-noted paradox that the "writers' theatre" scores its biggest successes with classic revivals. However, in a sense, this *Seagull* is a new play. The version is by Thomas Kilroy who has moved Chekhov's action to the West of Ireland and re-thought the relationships in terms of Anglo-Irish colonialism. Arkadina thus becomes Miss Isobel Desmond, famed star of *Petticoat Perfidy*; the steward Shamraev becomes Cousin Gregory, a penniless provincial relative; and Constantine changes from an East European symbolist into a Gaelic Revival nationalist. "Oh Lord, it's one of those Celtic things!" his mother complains when the curtain goes up on his Yeatsian monologue, showing Nina swathed in Burne-Jones draperies.

Nigel Terry as the National Theatre's Don Juan. Photo: Michael Mayhew.

Immediately the play comes into local focus. We have no bearings on the Russian provinces, but we know the distances from London to Dublin, and to the West, and how remote Galway feels when you get there. All the geographical and climatic circumstances take on a new life: the plight of poor Semyon having to trudge home in the rain, Gregory's rage at these townies' demand for horses during a spell of good harvesting weather; the tensions between the parasitic summer visitors and those who are stuck on the impoverished estate all the year round.

As I hope all that suggests, the importance of Kilroy's text does not lie in any variations it weaves around *The Seagull* but in its power to reveal the original work. Celtic twilight is strictly confined to the play by the lake; otherwise we are in the brightly lit company of a group of egoists whose motives are exposed with unsparing harshness. We know exactly what they all want, we have wanted the same things ourselves.

Take the scene of Arkadina's recapture of Trigorin. As this is restaged for Miss Desmond and her wavering Aston, it changes from a high comedy demonstration of female possessiveness into a brutal physical combat, with Anna Massey digging her nails into him, panting out the flattering lies until he reverts to dull resignation. "How could any woman want me?" he asks, implanting a disgusted kiss.

Alan Rickman is the first Trigorin I have seen who takes the character's self-assessment at face value and presents the occupation of writer as a disease. Even after the brutal scene outlined above, he immediately sits down to record it in his notebook for future fictional use. He lives only inside the notebook, otherwise he is as miserably awkward as a fish out of water. Any idea that he is hoping for salvation from the relationship with Nina is demolished in the assignation scene. He scribbles an address in Victoria with the name of the landlady, and furtively adds one tell-tale comment: "very *discreet*."

I could dwell in similar detail on Anton Lesser's Constantine, Stuart Burge's Peter and Harriet Walter's Nina. Admittedly something goes out of the show when the Roman Catholic peasant Semyon (Tony Rohr) finally walks out into the night — "I'll go back home to where I belong" — leaving the Big House Protestants to finish off the show by themselves: but it is the best production of the play I have seen.

And so to the bad news: the long-delayed opening of Barrie Keeffe and Ray Davies' musical *Chorus Girls*, adapted from Aristophanes' *The Poet and the Women*. Originally commissioned by the National Theatre and featuring a character based on the NT's artistic director Peter Hall, the piece finally arrives at the crumbling Theatre Royal in the East End (formerly the home of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop) with an even statelier personage in the lead.

In moving *Chorus Girls* from the most privileged to the most beleagured theatre in the land, Keeffe (if not Davies) has massively re-adapted the adaptation. Still taking its cue and its best situation from the Greek (showing a male spy sneaking into an all-female rite), it now opens as a command performance on the theatre's last night before being bulldozed into a job centre for Thatcher's unemployed.

The girls kick off with an unscheduled protest number which has the manager and the police tearing their hair out, but arouses *only* languid appreciation from the royal box ("Jolly amusing little song"). Prince Charles — for it is he — then descends to shake hands with the chorus line and falls through a trap, remaining under the stage for the rest of the show while the nation gathers around its TV sets and the armed forces spring into action against the kidnapping of the century.

Except, unfortunately, that he has not been kidnapped. Having got the Prince and the girls together, Keeffe has to find some pretext for keeping him there, and none is forthcoming. The show includes a comic mayor, a farcically officious body-

guard, and a pack of plain-speaking locals who jointly score up points about police corruption, civic planning, and many another urgent topic, but there is no story. This sad show opened in the immediate wake of Keeffe's brilliant film on East End criminal organisations, *The Long Good Friday*, and touches on some of the same issues. More than any other living writer, he is the spokesman of the social underdog. What vandals and football hooligans express through violence he puts into words. But his talent serves a dark vision and abandons him at the frontiers of comedy.

Meanwhile, those who believe that old masterpieces can only speak to us from their own place and time will find strong confirmation in Peter Gill's production of Moliere's *Don Juan* (Cottesloe Studio). The novelty in this case consists of a mute, grey-clad chorus who begin as mobile scenery and finally converge on the hero, driving him into the flaming pit — as if the very furniture were mutinying against such an enemy of nature. But the power of this device derives from the seventeenth-century costume and eloquent formality of the central action (thanks partly to an unashamedly literate translation by the novelist John Fowles). An uncompromising view of an ambiguous play arises from a scrupulously unslanted performance that is one definition of masterly direction.

U.S.A.

Self explanations

by **Karl Levett**

The need to explain oneself and one's culture to a wider world has consistently been a creative dynamic for many a playwright. This dynamic has recently given New Yorkers two of the most original and thought-provoking plays offered by Off-Broadway this season.

In *Meetings* Mustapha Matura seeks to explain what it is to be a Trinidadian, to live on an island where Western civilisation is bulldozing away the older native culture. David Henry Hwang in *The Dance and the Railroad* wishes to show what it is to be a Chinese-American, to be an immigrant whose established values of a revered culture are suddenly thrown into chaos in a brave but brazen New World. Both playwrights demonstrate their characters attempting to straddle two warring cultures, giving us individuals with one foot on the Old and one foot on the New and being emotionally torn asunder in the process.

Michele Shay, Carl Lumbly and Seret Scott in Meetings. *Photo: Martha Swope*

In addition to the ambitious task that both Matura and Hwang have set themselves, the two plays are each distinguished by an originality of concept and a laudable economy of word, setting and characters. A little of the particular gives us a panorama of the general. Each play has a freshness that is only partly explained by exotic subject matter seen by jaded Western eyes. It is a freshness that comes from new material being brought into sudden and sharp focus.

Mustapha Matura was born in Trinidad and moved to England in 1960. His first full length play *As Time Goes By* was produced successfully in London in 1967. His *Play Mas* started at the Royal Court and transferred to the West End. This is the world premier of *Meetings* and the Phoenix Theatre, probably aware that they had a small but valuable package in their hands, have delivered with a production that is first class in every way.

The setting is that triumph of Western civilisation, the kitchen-that-has-everything (well, everything but food as the husband will soon ruefully report). It belongs to a young black couple, both professionals, but each sufficiently secure to retain the colourful patois of their island speech. In this kitchen they meet briefly before rushing to jobs that allow them to maintain an obviously high standard of Western living.

This capitalistic idyll begins to crack when the husband meets an old woman selling native goods outside his modern office block. Soon he becomes obsessed with "the old t'ings we used to eat" and the granddaughter of the old woman is established in his kitchen to cook "the old t'ings". Meanwhile the wife who is an advertising executive is working on a promotional campaign for a new cigarette that we gradually learn is literally a killer.

Meetings starts out as a bright sardonic comedy, but by subtle degrees the play darkens and it soon becomes apparent that in this kitchen Mr Matura has bigger fish to fry. Food is the means by which the husband is led back to all the old values of his abandoned culture, while his wife just as determinedly pursues her campaign with the killer cigarette. By the final curtain Mr Matura would like us to have a nightmare and apocalyptic vision of this

John Lone and Tzi Ma in The Dance and the Railroad. *Photo: Bert Andrews*

clash of cultures What has gone before can hardly carry such a burden and the last scene is intellectually attractive without being too convincing

You might guess that to move from such light to dark takes some nimble writing and this Mr Matura achieves helped considerably by his three players under the sensitive direction of Gerald Gutierrez Michele Shay as the wife gives a detailed a performance as any by a New York actress this season Perhaps Mr Matura did mean for the wife to be the villain of the piece but Ms Shay is so persuasive, combining charm and grace with a gritty cunning, that she is at first comic and then pathetic, but always sympathetic See Ms Shay convey (without ever voicing it) her suspicion when the young cook moves into the house a look, a turn of the body How nice to see a performance of such controlled physical and vocal detail Carl Lumbly gives the husband a warm and natural strength so that Ms Shay in no way tips the balance of the play Seret Scott as the young girl has an uncloying sweetness that convinces us that maybe the "old things" might be best Indeed this is (and you can't make this statement very often) a cast that could hardly be bettered

There is only a cast of two in *The Dance and the Railroad* but the very limitation seems a blessing The playwright David Henry Hwang is a 24 year-old Chinese-American who last year attracted attention for his remarkably mature drama *FOB* which played at the Public Theater *FOB* demonstrated how assimilated Chinese-Americans mock a "Fresh-Off-The-Boat" immigrant

In his new play Mr Hwang again makes California the setting but the time is the Railroad Strike of 1867 Two Chinese labourers are waiting out the strike One of these is Lone who has been in America for two years and was an actor in a Chinese opera troupe before his parents sold him into servitude The other, Ma is a rookie, four weeks in California and filled with dreams of gold and good fortune Ma wants to learn the gymnastic tricks of the Chinese opera and on a lonely mountain top, Lone reluctantly becomes his teacher

Through a series of encounters we see Ma struggling to become an artist — he must for example, imitate a locust through a whole night on the mountain The subtle balance of teacher and pupil changes Finally, when the strike is settled with the workers gaining much less than they held out for it is Ma, the pupil, whose anger suddenly makes him the stronger of the two Lone accepts and suddenly he seems to be the one who will not survive, while Ma the American locust, will make his way

The play is only an hour long but it is filled with echoes of great themes survival, tradition, art and the artist, the clash of cultures The play is poetic but straightforward, with Hwang blending colloquial American speech with traditional Chinese opera mime This mixture creates a surprisingly potent theatrical form The performance by John Lone and Tzi Ma (yes the actors *are* the characters), with Mr Lone directing succeeds in being economic and exotic at the same time Mr Lone is a remarkable acrobat and dancer and that's only part of his performance

This play was presented at the New Federal Theatre as part of an Ethnic Heritage series At the performance I attended, several Chinese-American children sat engrossed Perhaps their attention was due to the playing being for them, truly self-explanatory

Oh, that all self-explanations might be as interesting as *Meetings* and *The Dance and the Railroad*

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HOLLAND FESTIVAL

This 34th International Festival of Arts will be held in Netherlands cities including Amsterdam, The Hague Scheveningen and Rotterdam Opera, dance, theatre, puppet theatre, concerts Information on programme and bookings from ITI Centre June 1-July 15, 1981

25TH INTERNATIONAL SUMMER DANCE ADADEMY

Will take place in Cologne from July 5-19, 1981, and will include the Choreographic Competition (July 11 and 12) Special courses will be offered October 16-24 Information and prosprectuses from Sekretariat Tanzakademie, Vogelsanger Strasse 28-32, 5000 Cologne 30, Germany

BAYREUTH 1981

The Richard Wagner Festival will include *Tristan and Isolde* (musical director Daniel Barenboim), *Der fliegende Hollander* (new musical direction Peter Schneider), a new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* (musical director Mark Elder), *Lohengrin* (musical direction Woldemar Nellson), and *Parsifal* (musical direction Horst Stein) Information from FRG Centre of ITI, Bismarckstrasse 17, 1000 Berlin 12, Federal Republic of Germany July 25-August 28, 1981

THIRD INTERNATIONAL BALLET PEDAGOGICAL SEMINAR

Held in Varna under the auspices of the Bulgarian Centre of the ITI the Seminar aims to further the study of classical choreography, this year is devoted to the works of Bournonville and Petja Open to all ballet teachers and their pupils aged 16-24 years Information and application form from Australian Centre of the ITI July 6-19, 1981

VISITOR FROM ISRAEL

Maestro Jacobo Kaufmann, Director, Jerusalem Centre for Music Theatre, will be with the West Australian Opera Company, directing *La Boheme*, *La Serva Padrona* and *The Magic Flute* during June to October 1981 He would like to see the work of Australian theatre companies with a view to directing with them, and is also interesting in lecturing at tertiary institutions on subjects like 'Opera', 'Jewish Traditional Theatre', 'Theatre and Music in Israel' and 'Playwriting and Composing related to the Bible' Write to Mtro J Kaufmann, c/- ITI Centre

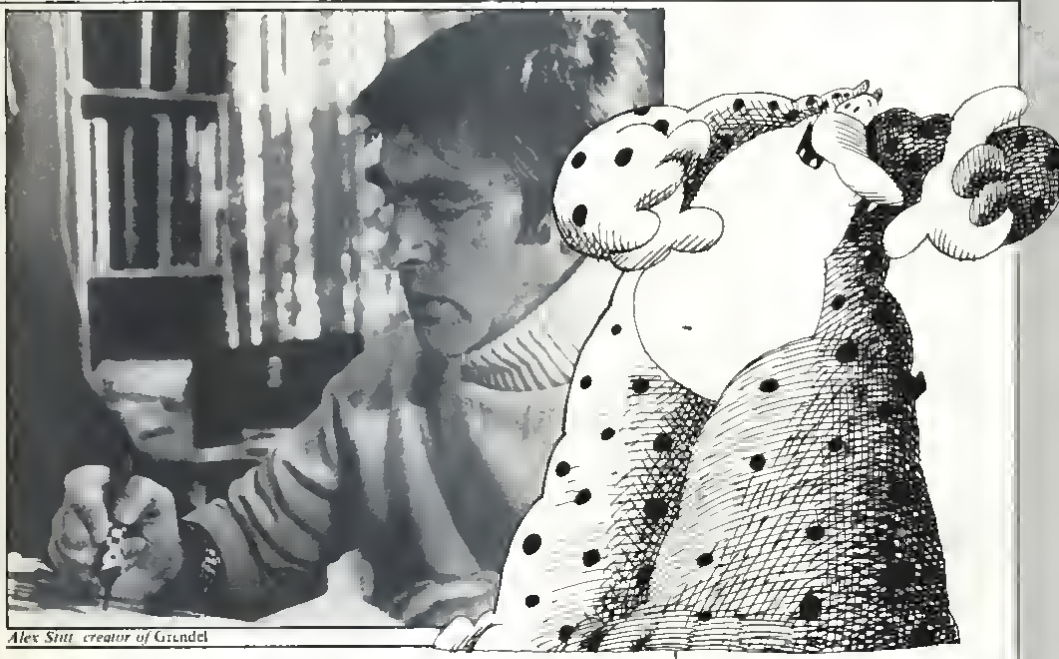
TANDEM — THEATRICAL DOCUMENTATION IN GERMANY

Tandem is a computer system recently installed in Frankfurt/Main, so that data on past and present productions of German theatre can be called up and read from terminal screens Australia next?

RECORD FROM INTER—NATIONAL WOMEN'S FESTIVAL

A record made during the 1979 Festival in Amsterdam, includes Liza Mayo from Spiderwoman Theatre, Sharon Landau and Ova Record released by Milkyway Records, c - Melkweg Lijnbaansgracht 234 A, 1017 PH, Amsterdam, Holland, postal subscription DM 18

FILM



Alex Stitt creator of Grendel

Grendel; bonhomie and innocence

by Elizabeth Riddell

Grendel Grendel Grendel breaks new ground in the industry For one thing it is our first feature length (90 minutes) commercial animated film and for another it owes nothing to Walt Disney on the one hand nor to the aggressive Ralph Blashki on the other It deliberately leans away from either of these stereotypes

Although a good deal of pink cartoon blood is shed during the course of the film, its bonhomie and innocence defeats tragedy The characters are silly but not mean, and Disney's bitch-princesses, with their sexual prurience, are notably absent The only female character is indeed a princess but a puddingy one, shown only for a second minus her 8th century upholstery

As might be expected from Alexander Stitt, the director of *Grendel Grendel Grendel*, the film is remarkable for the dazzling purity of its colours and for the general rotundity of the figures Squat but graceful people - King Hrothgar, Wiglaf, Dung and Unferth — their boots appear to be growing out of the earth Those of us who have seen Stitt's television pieces (including "Life, Be In It") will find this lot of pre-mediaeval tribesmen pleasantly familiar

Stitt and the producer, Phillip Adams, worked on *Grendel* for four years while busy with other projects They competed in the United States for the rights to the book of the same name by John Gardner, at a time when *Grendel* had become a cult novel I remember that it was pressed into my hand a few years ago by an enthusiast, and that I abandoned it as not my cup of tea after a few pages

But it is an ideal choice for animation What I took for boring twee-ness comes over as benign simplicity It is the story of a 12ft fat roly poly fellow, a bit human and somewhat animal, perhaps a green-with-spots yeti, who is seen by Hrothgar and his tribe as The Great Boogy, sure to do them harm Grendel wants to make friends but they chase him off, which causes him to turn slightly nasty Hrothgar sends for Beowolf, the great warrior, when Grendel peevishly starts snapping off the heads of the king's hangers-on And Beowulf like many a mercenary before and since, is just the chap to deal with Grendel

I am not sure at what audience John Gardiner aimed his novel, though he probably envisioned the kind which goes for Tolkein Nor am I sure to whom Adams and Stitt are directing their film The box office will decide that

The principal voices used are the attractive ones of Peter Ustinov, Keith Michell, Arthur Dignam and Julie McKenna They also sing some rather good songs, the work of Bruce Smeaton who scored *Grendel* But it has to be said that there is rather a lot of talk, perhaps more than is necessary for enjoyment

OPERA

Manon and Barber in Melbourne

BY KEN HEALEY

Melbourne was the opera capital of Australia for April and May. In April I saw two operas there about which my preconceptions were strong. *Manon Lescaut*, perhaps my favourite unseen opera, and *The Barber of Seville*, unquestionably my unfavourite in the standard repertoire. In the event, my reaction — one enjoyed, the other endured — may have seemed predictable. The trouble was that they were the wrong way about.

Despite my sense of occasion surrounding the Australian Opera's 25th anniversary and the glamour attaching to Romanian soprano Gabriela Cegolea, the second performance of *Manon Lescaut* at the Palais, St Kilda, was a major disappointment. On the other hand, after what critics and audience alike had agreed

John Pringle (Figaro) and Glenis Fowles in The Barber of Seville

was a disastrous opening night, Rossini's *old boiler of a Barber* sent me home satisfied after its second showing.

The quartering of a torso (after drawing, but rarely hanging) is a sight now seen only on butchers' premises. And quartering, into four oh-so-separate acts, is what no fewer than seven butcher-librettists did to the *corpus* of the Abbe Prevost's *Manon* novel, in an effort to fashion a book for Puccini's third opera. No doubt they were hampered by not wanting to copy scenes from Massenet's *Manon*, derived from the same source, and premiered only six years earlier. Producer John Copley and his designer, Kristian Fredrikson, played king's horses and king's men to the opera's Humpty-Oumpty. They assuredly could not put it together again.

The opera's problems become evident as the curtain rises on Act II. After a scene culminating in young lovers' flight after love at first sight (a standard romantic first act, complete with a seemingly villainous brother to the heroine), we suddenly find that Manon has abandoned her impoverished tenor for the luxury provided by the old basso who has conspired with her brother to abduct her before the interval.

High drama is achieved when the tenor returns to escape with his lady, only to be foiled because of her cupidity. This is a daring scene, the leading lady as anti-hero. Unfortunately, Gabriela Gegolea rendered it ludicrous, stripping unsexily down to her corset, and generally exhibiting no more than rudimentary acting skills. This is a pity, because her voice is luscious and ample, toppling from the highest class among sopranos only at its top. She simply opens wide and shouts her highest notes.

The audience continues to find that the gaps in the story line amount to chasms, as the third act shows Manon amid the prostitutes awaiting deportation to Louisiana. It comes as little shock to find the lovers dying of thirst in the desert (!) near New Orleans in Act IV.

Opera singers are singularly disadvantaged when they are not protected by a convincing dramatic framework, one begins to cavil at indifferent acting and less than perfect vocalisation. Tenor Lamberto Furlan (Des Grieux) continues to improve both as singer and actor, but in a setting such as this, one remembers too vividly how far he still has to go. Will his pleasing lyric tenor ever expand at the top? Will he ever have confidence to take his eyes for two minutes together away from the prompter's box and/or the conductor?

Young John Fulford was better than

Gabriela Gegolea as Manon in Manon Lescaut

promising as Lescaut, Manon's brother, who turns out to be not a bad chap as operatic baritones go. In smaller roles Robert Gard was a delight as a dancing master; Robin Donald opened the opera well as the student Edmondo, and the diminutive Sergei Baiguldin poured out golden sounds in the tiny role of a lamplighter. Alan Light otherwise convincing as the old protector, Geronte, is no longer the singer he once was.

Consideration of music leads to a specific and a general point. Carlo Felice Cillario once again elicited from the unfashionable Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra an evening's playing that was at once stylish and spirited. More generally, Puccini's score is hardly inferior to those of his full maturity. But, as musicians unwittingly tell us when they praise the score of, say, *Simon Boccanegra* or even *Lakme*, not even the finest playing of a dramatically flawed work can save it in the opera house. The flaws in the libretto of

Manon Lescaut are such that only a great cast in the hands of a producer of vision could make us forget them amid genuine stage excitement

Manon Lescaut may well have its triumph, even in this setting the fabric of which it is to share with a future production of Massenet's *Manon* Indeed it seems that Marilyn Zschau may have achieved just that last year in Sydney Basically sound productions do have a way of revealing their strengths at last And this is what has finally happened to the Brighton Pavilion setting by John Cox and Roger Butlin of Rossini's *Barber*

When it was first seen in the early 1970's, the predominantly white visual experience was dominating a subdued almost serious production It was as though Cox had said "This is a classic like *The Marriage of Figaro*. Let us treat it as such" Instead of improving it initially regressed being revived in Italian after opening in English Now a comprehensible translation has returned and a good deal of fun has surfaced, presumably thanks to Tessa Bremner, who is given credit for directing rehearsals

Coincidentally, Rossini's *Barber* was faced with the same problem as Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* There was a recent popular setting (this time by Paisielo) holding the stage But the libretto of *Barber* is ideal of its type, and incidentally it was never mutilated in a wrong-headed attempt to avoid copying Paisielo's story (which had originated in "commedia dell'arte")

The reason for my lack of enchantment with the piece is that I do not respond to Rossini's music unless it is superlatively sung Even when it is I applaud the singers rather than the opera I may even allow that Rossini wrote some fine arias, but not a satisfying whole That judgment is surprisingly modified after a night at the Princess Theatre, where among the arias only John Pringle's "Largo al factotum" deserved and received enthusiastic and prolonged applause

Glenys Fowles is almost everything one could wish for in a Rosina pert, pretty, musical, and involved Unfortunately, she is not a coloratura soprano and had to manufacture a vocal line from various bits and pieces in the higher altitudes In spite of her vocal strategems she scored a success

As Almaviva, Henri Wilden improved after a precarious start in which the *fioritura* of "Ecco ridente in cielo" palpably troubled him Such was his unease that I could not be sure of his intentions when he began the aria in Italian but was certainly singing later in his not very clear English

As Basilio Donald Shanks can never be anyone but Shanks, convincing though he might be as Sparafucile Sarastro, the Commendatore or Boris It does not matter much One forgives the impossibility of this vigorous giant as music master because of his voice This is particularly so because Alan Light's Bartolo, the sole survivor from the original cast, and always a finely honed characterisation is no longer in a tonal sense sung during the recitatives He speaks them more or less on pitch, then produces a singer's tone to make a surprisingly good job of the actual songs

The source of most of my joy was John Pringle's almost too aristocratic Figaro, which helped create a safe ensemble with his fellows, who included Elizabeth Fretwell as Berta The very security of it all was reassuring as well it needed to be Peter Seymour in the pit gave us a tedious overture and competent never sparkling accompaniment

I still prefer Donizetti's best comic operas and Rossini's own *Cinderella* to the *Barber* But where, apart from *The Marriage of Figaro* does one find comic operas as excellent of their kind as the great operatic tragedies and melodramas? Verdi's *Falstaff*, and by equating comic with non-tragic, perhaps *Die Meistersinger* Rossini's *Barber* does after all rank high in mostly undistinguished company, and this production has become tradesmanlike and enjoyable

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Lamberto Furlan as Mario Cavaradossi and
John Shaw/Raymond Myers as Scarpia.

With Graeme Ewer/Neville Grave,
Bruce Martin/John Wegner, Robert Eddie,
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DANCE

Michela Kirkaldie and Gary Norman in the AB's Onegin *Photo Branco Gaica*

Programme I and Onedin

by Bill Shoubridge

One of the greatest problems for a Company mounting a triple ballet bill is that of contrast and balance There can't be too much romantic reverie and there can't be too much hardline The problem is more difficult than that of selecting programmes for a symphony concert because it isn't just a matter of the music, it has to take into account the style and "look" of the choreography

Therefore in the first programme of the Australian Ballet's 1981 Sydney season we had Gerald Arpino's *Kettentanz* (long frocks), *Carmen* by Roland Petit (colourful sets and costumes) and Serge Lifar's *Suite en Blanc* (classicals tutus). There were the usual voices raised about the lack of set in *Kettentanz* and *Suite en Blanc*, but these bleats are always so impossible to justify that they can be comfortably ignored

Whether the AB administration likes it or not, the fact remains that the short (30-40 minute) plotless ballet is what characterises the choreographic trends of this century and where its greatest achievements lie Trying to force 19th century patterns and modes on a modern mind is merely retrograde and self defeating but it still does go on

Kettentanz is one of the ballets that continues the trend set up by *Les Noces Symphonic Variations Agon* and so on Unfortunately it is also one of the ballets that weakens and dilutes the premise of the one-act plotless ballet Whereas a work like Balanchine's *Agon* lives and invents its world from second to second in performance, *Kettentanz* trails bits of atmosphere and wisps of "story" about with it like a safeguard

The atmosphere is that of turn-of-the-century, gemutlich, never-never land Vienna, and is, in the end, a glossy rehash of the All Purpose Romping Ballet Peasant syndrome The wisps of story are those of hinted relationships a la *Dances at a Gathering* but lest audiences think that Gerald Arpino is not "with it" he occasionally goes all coy and says it is "just dancing" So he sits astride two stools, whipping his dancers through their paces

of mood and image in a near hysterical apology for liveliness

A regular minestrone of a ballet is *Kettenianz* there are chains of cutesy skipping couples contest-time duets for the men full of air turns and split landings the women are caught and thrown and whizzed through the air like footballs One girl, for the sake of contrast gets down on the floor and goes through a Lolita-like solo of sensuous stretches and throughout there is such a frenetic emphasis on ever changing port-de-bras taken at such high speed that they end up looking like an epileptic sending semaphore signals

There is so much going on in this pointless farrago that one is left breathless by the multiplicity of images and the sad thought that while the excellent dancers of the company are equal to the technical demands of the work and relish performing it so much, it is a pity they can't be put to better advantage in a ballet that at least has a mind

When it comes to Roland Petit's dated *Carmen*, one can't really say what is is about It was a good vehicle for Zizi Jeanmarie is her hey day, but she and it have had their day If *Carmen* got a really terrific reading with a stellar cast and the (proper) sets, it could be fanned into sporadic life I suppose, but with such placid and half-hearted readings as two of the AB casts gave it, the poor thing hasn't got a chance

The trouble is and always will be that the work is so dusty Its etoliated storyline stolen from the Prosper Merimee novel and its music ransacked from Bizet's opera, never makes us believe in its characters There is precious little of interest in the way of vibrant choreography apart from the "morning glory" pas de deux in the bedroom which was tailormade for the gyrating hips and pouting lips of Jeanmarie

Of the AB ballerinas who assayed the role, Michela Kirkaldie played it like a supposedly prim little English gel making a bit of whooppee on the continent, as if it were all a pleasant game played out before the new school term started Sheree Rayment, who together with her Don Jose (David Birch) went especially to Marseilles to be personally coached by Petit in the part, was just too stiff, nervous and unsexy to make anyone interested in her It wasn't all her fault either I get the feeling that Petit, getting on in years, has succumbed to an attack of Serious Significant Artwork disease Other casts that he has coached (like Karen Kain and Frank Augustyn of the Canadian National Ballet) are just as stiff, reverent and dull

Petit wants this little cabaret cartoon ballet to be a worthwhile product of his genius and he has therefore laid greater emphasis on the ecole-de-danse aspects of the ballet Petit is very serious these days, but just as brainless (he's even attempted a ballet version of Proust's *Recherche de Temps Perdu*) and poor little *Carmen*, the sexy balletta has become *Carmen* the story of lust and driven destruction

Needless to say the structure can't contain such pompous self-serious twaddle which means that probably no one could get the war horse to work these days Certainly the Australian Ballet can't and the thing should be jettisoned, but it won't though they'll keep thrashing about in it rather than getting on with something better I sometimes wonder whether the AB actually likes classical dance at all

Take Serge Lifar's *Suite en Blanc* for example All the trappings of a great piece of classical ballet are there, the tutus and gilets, the ecstatic Wagnerian score and the general air of aloof hauteur that personifies the great scenas of a classical divertissement But there is very little in it that illuminates the genre of ballet, it is an inert mass of indications

The ballet was premiered in 1943 by the Paris Opera Ballet at the height of the Occupation In his autobiography, *Ma Vie*, Lifar tells us that in his position as Ballet Master his sole concern was to keep the Opera functioning, and for the Ballet to retain its (he thought) pre-eminent position in the dance world After the war, there was a lot of unpleasantness at the opera because of what many saw as Lifar's co-operation with the Nazis

All that is merely background, what is important is the fact that Lifar wanted, in this ballet, to emphasise the role of tradition in the Paris Opera Ballet and to keep that tradition high amongst the dancers that remained at the time So what he concocted was a divertissement hieratic almost in its stiff courtliness One can pick the traditions that went into the piece, the principal one being that of the Annual *Grande Defile de Foier de la Danse*, an almost militaristic display of the entire Ballet Company, from the "rats" to the etoiles, paraded and exhibited to the public in a stream of self congratulatory fervour All of this is in *Suite en Blanc*, the parallel lines, the rigid symmetry of form and gesture, the souless partnerings and permutations of groupings One gets the feeling, watching it, that Lifar must have spent hours in front of a toy theatre at home making up lines of dancers in much the same style as a general marshalling his forces

I would love to be able to say that the work is a thrilling exercise in dance, but it is not What it is is a formal study in posture and pose, a stodgy blend of laquer and cobwebs No other ballet company in the world (as far as I know) has bothered to mount any Lifar's ballets today, the Paris Opera only does them itself occasionally when it feels in an indulgent mood

If the AB wanted a big classical ballet piece to round off the evening, why on earth couldn't they have mounted Balanchine's *Simphoni in C*, it is bigger grander, more exciting and positively sings with its glorification of classical dancing but perhaps the rights to it were more expensive

At the time of Anne Woolliams' tenure as Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet she mounted Cranko's *Onegin* on the company having already given it a great asset in the same choreographer's *Romeo and Juliet* Having worked so long for Cranko with the Stuttgart Ballet we knew then that what we were seeing was probably one of the best drilled mountings of this difficult ballet

During this year's revival of *Onegin*, memories of that premier kept flooding back to reinforce what we were seeing in the present performances It was not that the work was coming apart at the seams, far from it, the excellent dancing from the soloists and corps, so rewarding in the triple bill programme, was still in evidence It was just that the finer shadings and deeper touches of meaning in the major principal parts were sketched in and in such a psychological ballet as *Onegin* such a mishap can destroy the delicate thread of meaning and sympathy

In both casts the lead role of *Onegin* (taken by Gary Norman and Gale Baker) were one dimensional and flat Norman was totally disengaged throughout while Baker played Onegin like an old Etonian dull of mind, supercilious and cold, which meant all the sympathy went to the Tatiana of Joanne Michel assaying (to reasonably good effect) her first major dramatic role

This if course, is wrong The poem, opera and ballet are about him, a Byronic dreamer always searching for the Ideal Womansoul, and always losing sight of her realising his tragic loss too late He should be l'etranger but the way Norman and Baker played him, he was just a prig and a snob

The one saving grace of the performances was the execution of the three big pas de deux Both the first cast (Norman and Michela Kirkaldie) and the second (Baker and Michel) danced these brilliantly, taking the convoluted partnerings, Bolshoi style lifts and split second timings with authority and style Both casts also managed to unfold the growing psychological complexities in the duets in each consecutive act

It is just unfortunate that they could not make the drama more consistent or the characterisation more involving

Light-hearted shows

CANBERRA THEATRE

by Janet Healey

Separate Tables by Terence Rattigan Lieder Southern Regional Theatre
Director **John Spicer**
(Pro/Am)
Kiss Me Kate by Cole Porter Canberra Philharmonic Society
Director **Eileen Gray**, Producer **John Thompson**, Musical Director **Keith Helgeson**
(Amateur)
Prisoner of Second Avenue by Neil Simon. Canberra Repertory Society
Producer **Pamela Rosenberg**
(Amateur)

April in Canberra was a light-hearted month for theatre-goers Philharmonic offered a season of Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate*, Repertory was playing Neil Simon's *Prisoner of Second Avenue* at Theatre Three, and, for the intrepid, Goulburn's Lieder South Regional Theatre had a production of Terence Rattigan's *Separate Tables*

Separate Tables maintained the high standards, within fairly severe financial restrictions, that audiences have come to expect from this company the problem lay in the play itself Rattigan's best work has a certain antique and faded charm, but it's still difficult to believe that he is a twentieth century playwright. *Separate Tables* is really two small plays, with the leading actors playing different roles in each "half" It hovers uneasily between the commercial laugh-a-liner and a heavy-handed moralising approach (crystallised in the blatantly obvious metaphor of the title) articulated in tedious detail and imposed on the surface of the play rather than emerging naturally from its dramatic concerns

Three fine performances almost lifted the play above these limitations Mary Spicer's Miss Meacham was a beautiful cameo of an eccentric spinster absorbed in the vicissitudes of the turf, yet capable of responding to the surrounding world with a pithy expression of what needed to be said Evol McLeod, as Mrs Shankland Sybil Rallion-Bell, was exquisite and believably bitchy in the first role, and portrayed a neuroticism frighteningly close to reality in the second, though I did feel that her performance as Sybil was a little too much larger-than-life for a small acting space John Cuffe, imported from Canberra to play Mr Malcolm Major Pollock, turned in predictably fine performances in both roles, extracting the maximum of humour and pathos

Musical comedy isn't my preferred form of entertainment, and perhaps it demonstrates how much expectations can influence enjoyment that I found Philharmonic's *Kiss Me Kate* a damn good evening out (It also, incidentally, reinforced my belief that a musical benefits enormously from a good dramatic story line.)

This production evidenced a very commendable advance for Philharmonic in peripheral but important aspects of musical comedy presentation, such as set and costume design and choreography the latter, particularly, was impressively expert without being obtrusive The orchestra, under Keith Helgeson, was easily the best pit orchestra the company has ever had, firmly disciplines and never too loud — those who are familiar with the Canberra Theatre acoustic will appreciate this achievement

It's a pity that with such solid support, the singing was less than adequate Ian Fletcher (Petruchio Fred Graham) has a pleasant baritone voice and is quite sufficiently good-looking for the role, but both his acting and his singing lacked the swagger and bite necessary for conviction Trish Dzelde (Katherine Lilli Vanessi), a newcomer to Philo, looked enchanting and hurled things around the stage with abandoned zest, but was vocally close to disastrous, being shrill and edgy with no compensating stylistic assurance

The Neil Simon play at Theatre Three was another fly-in-amber Couples driven mad by compulsory high-rise living are pretty old-hat these days, and in any case, for Australian audiences at least, Williamson does this serious-social-comment-floating-in-comic-froth much better Nevertheless, there were impressive performances from Kate Peters and Warwick Ongley in the main roles, with American accents (essential to the success of the play) admirably sustained Director Pamela Rosenberg had evidently allowed these two seasoned performers to develop their own feel for pace and timing, and the result was a vigorous and racy performance with no loss of verbal comic impact One can only regret that the basic material was not more rewarding

Kate Peters and Warwick Ongley in Canberra Rep's Prisoner of Second Avenue *Photo: Ross Gould*

Low key and scenic extravagance

NO NAMES...NO PACKDRILL THE MYSTERY PLAYS

by John McCallum

No Names...No Packdrill by **Bob Herbert**. Hunter Valley Theatre Company. Civic Playhouse, Newcastle NSW. Opened April 10 1981.
Director **Aarne Neeme**; Designer **Bill Haycock**, Stage Manager **Alan Gannaway**.
Cast: Rebel **Russell Kiefel**; Kathy **Lorrie Cruickshank**; Tiger **Jonathan Biggins**; Mrs Palmer **Julie Kirby**; Joycie **Julie Hudspeth**; Bernie **Alan McFaddea**; Browning **Tom White**; Webb **Terry Crawford**; Lambert **Nigel Davenport**; Dagwood **David Wood**.
(Professional)

The Mystery Plays translated and adapted by **Robert Page**. The Dean and Chapter of Christ Church Cathedral in association with the English and Drama Departments of the University of Newcastle. Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle NSW. Opened April 21 1981.
Director **Robert Page**, Designer **David Wood**, Stage Manager **John Zeder**, Musical Director **Margaret Lloyd**, Costumes, props **Hugh Colman** (STC SA).
Cast: Jesus **John Doyle**; with **Leigh Wallis**, **David Frost**, **Malcolm Burnes**, **Dennis Biggins**, **Grahame Wren**, **Louise Newey**, **Glenn Osborne**, **Nola Wallace**, **Gary McLean**, **Glenn Butcher**, **Damon Brooks** et al
(Pro/Am)

Overpaid, oversexed and over here — the Yanks in Australia in wartime, eating out women, raping our food. As a student sharing a house I remember the R & R servicemen on leave in Sydney during the Vietnam war. My flatmate brought one home for the night once. He wanted to marry her, so he said, but times had changed — he didn't have to. During the Second World War the Yanks felt they had to promise marriage.

No Names...No Packdrill is by now familiar to many theatregoers (except in Melbourne of course). In the Hunter Valley Theatre Company's production, directed by Aarne Neeme, an attempt has been made to give it more political resonance than the script actually warrants. Rebel (Russell Kiefel) is played not as a macho American marine who happens to be a coward because his father used to beat him up but as a genuinely gentle peaceful man caught up in a war in which she (like, one hopes, many people) has no place. This makes nonsense of the script's intimations of his obscure Oedipal past but it gives the play a bite which it might not otherwise have had — and incidentally allows for a fine sympathetic performance by Russell Kiefel.

This reading of the play affects the other characters too. Kathy (Lorrie Cruickshank) becomes a stronger character, but, because the script demands certain "feminine" concessions from her, her romantic submission to Rebel's blatant manipulation becomes rather incredible. The character who benefits most from this production is Tiger (Jonathon Biggins) — the only character who really understands the war. His final dobbing in of Rebel has a regretable inevitability which gives it some moral point — strengthened also by a certain victim-quality Biggins manages to convey in Tiger.

The total effect of Neeme's production is rather low key, because he seems to have reacted against the more conventional, romantic elements in the script. But those elements continue to assert themselves. When at the end Kathy, who has got involved with Rebel through her growing love for him, and not because of any agreement with his cause, has to accept "I love you" as a reason for his *going away*, then the script and the production begin to appear at odds with each other.

Also in Newcastle at the moment is an ambitious pro am production of a new version of the mediaeval Mystery Plays by Robert Page. The venue is Christ Church Cathedral — a splendid building, the scale of which the production attempts to match, with an enormous steel A-frame set (with trucks and lifts), a large cast of well-known local personalities, and impressive costumes, props and masks partially from the earlier production by the State theatre Company of South Australia. The production is an illustration of what can be achieved when the resources of a generally non-theatrical community are mobilized.

It still is, after all, a great story, and given the appropriate scenic extravagance (which this production has) it still stirs the blood even of someone who was not brought up on it. It is also a style peculiarly suited to the talents of a (mostly) amateur cast — where grandness and declamatory playing seem wholly appropriate. Newcastle Cathedral is a wonderful venue, although more than a few rows back (where I moved after Act 1) the untheatrical acoustics and sight lines begin to have their effect.

Russell Kiefel (Rebel), Lorrie Cruickshank (Kathy) and Jonathon Biggins (Tiger) in HVTC's No Names...

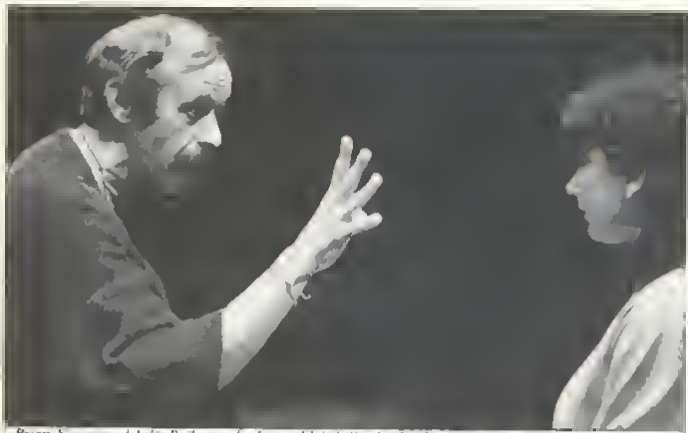
Highly pleasing production

I OUGHT TO BE IN PICTURES

by Barry O'Connor

I Ought To Be In Pictures by **Neil Simon**. Ensemble Theatre, Sydney NSW. Opened April 11 1981.
Director **Hayes Gordon**, Designer **Shaun Gurton**, Stage Manager **Neil Godfrey**.
Cast: Shelly **Sharon Flanagan**; Libby **Julie Bailue**; Herb **Brian Young**.
(Professional)

Neil Simon is not a readily exportable playwright, not even when he is attractively presented in an all-star movie package. The way he writes and the people he writes about seem to be firmly located in Manhattan (or Los Angeles, regretting that they ever left New York) living off



Brian Young and Julie Bailue in the Ensemble's I Ought To Be In Pictures. *Photo: Denis del Favero*

their nervous energy spouting wisecracks doing the full New York Jewish bit

I Ought To Be In Pictures takes place in a Hollywood bungalow inhabited by an ex-New York writer, Herb Tucker, who has done all he apparently can to make his house into an apartment. You can take the boy out of the city but you can't take the city out of the boy! The venetian blinds are angled against the sunlight which still manages to assault Tucker's seedy pad through the chink under his suburban front door.

Then one morning his daughter Libby, whom he'd abandoned along with his wife sixteen years ago, turns up. At first Herb doesn't notice Libby who is not inconspicuously dressed as if for a mountaineering expedition. The recognition scene is artfully delayed, and when it comes it does so in the resounding underplaying of Brian Young and Julie Bailue.

The rest of the play is about their mutual discovery, with the result that Libby loses her Hollywood aspirations (see title) and returns to the Big Apple ready to take a bite out of it. Herb, (or Hoib as we're now calling him), finds the inspiration to go on writing and to become the success that we all presumably knew he would make of himself. Actually the relationship, both in the writing and the production, is more sensitively portrayed than I'm managing to suggest. This is one Neil Simon where the people and their relationships truly shine through the defensive one-liners.

In his cast of three, add Sharon Flanagan to those already mentioned. Hayes Gordon has a first class team who would be at home on or off Broadway. All the actors are equally comfortable with the American accents and mannerisms.

A highly pleasing production in all respects. What a shame the actors didn't take their well deserved curtain call. But I suppose this was to remind us that the Ensemble is more accustomed to putting on plays which are more serious than *I Ought To Be In Pictures*.

Tedium of thin script

ROSES IN DUE SEASON

by Doreen Clarke.

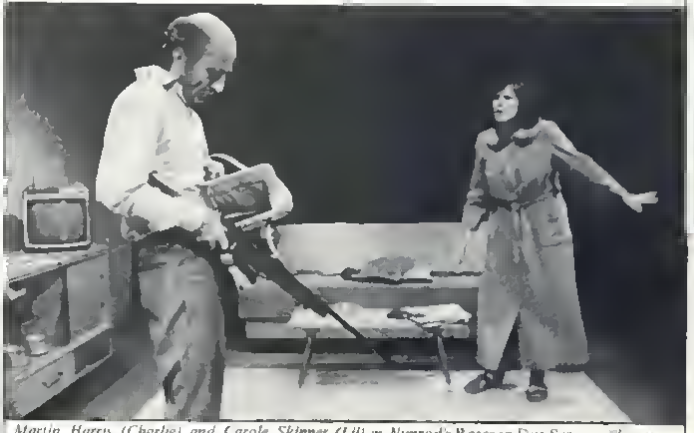
Roses in Due Season by **Doreen Clarke**, Nimrod Downstairs, Sydney NSW. Opened April 15, 1981. Director **Fay Makotow**; Assistant **Chris Johnson**; Designer, **Fiona Reilly**; Lighting, **Lee-Anne Donnolley**; Stage Manager **Anne Heath**.
Cast: Lil, **Carole Skinner**; Dawn, **Heather Mitchell**; Estelle, **Sally Cooper**; Charlie, **Martin Harris**; Sally, **Carole Skinner**.
(Professional)

A few incandescent moments of sympathetic acting from Carole Skinner were the only redeeming aspects of the recent excursion into despair at Nimrod's Downstairs. She as the mother at least injected some warmth and humanity into *Roses in Due Season*. But it would have taken much more than that to rescue Doreen Clarke's thin script from the tedium it forced upon the audiences.

It is a play which breaks all the normal rules of dramatic construction for the old-fashioned piece it is, but which does *not* succeed in spite of it. Mother Lil Marriot and daughters (though scarcely recognisable as such) Dawn and Estelle recover from the funeral of alcoholic Dad Charlie Marriot by launching us into a play-length flashback of the most obvious kind. The flashback is a put-up job intended to get us asking "why did Mother tolerate Charlie?" and "why does sharp-tongued daughter Dawn show the same inclination as Mother to burden herself with a hopeless husband etc in spite of her intelligence?" But all this merely slows the pace of the play as the inevitable 'before' and 'after' questions are worked through.

Admittedly, the actors have an unenviable task but they do not face it squarely. It is indeed hard to imagine an actress who could have turned the brittle and nasty Dawn into anything but the most unpleasantly boring character of the season. As it was, Heather Mitchell's self-righteous and slightly undergraduate pouting only enhanced the irritation of a badly-written character.

Martin Harris, once again playing specialist in archetypal Australian stereotypes, is here the alcoholic Australian Dad, the cause of all woes. Being outnumbered and much put-upon, especially in the interminable scene of Dawn's wedding-party, one begins to feel sorry for him both as



Martin Harris (Charlie) and Carole Skinner (Lil) in Nimrod's Roses in Due Season. *Photo: Carolyn Jones*

actor and character. Ironically enough, although director Fay Mokotow means to keep him firmly in the background, the end result is that the influence of Charlie and his mysterious mate Horrie (did he lace the orange juice with vodka maliciously or not?) looms over the performance as the little women bicker and bemoan their self-imposed fates.

It would be easy to see dramatic merit in the self-destructiveness of these women, were it not for the sheer incompetence of the presentation. The slow pace, the ill-managed and ill-lit tableaus and the incidental music reminiscent of earlier Australian 'rough' theatre somehow do not jell. One wondered momentarily whether Nimrod's technical standards had done a turn for the worse.

A confusion of styles and intent further beplagued the play. In spite of the encapsulating flashback, the play seemed no more or less than naturalistic, but it suddenly plunges into Patrick White-type surrealism when Charlie and his randy landlady Sally roll incoherently around a double bed with a bottle of plonk. The fact that this is the critical scene in which Charlie responds to Horrie's death further enhances the idea that there is something more intrinsically interesting about their relationship than any of the female relationships in the play.

When I go to the theatre I do not want to feel as if I am at a temperance-meeting. My intelligence is insulted by the tacit suggestion that it is the nature of men to be drunkards and women to be sufferers. What a sorry comparison this play makes with Dorothy Hewett's full-blooded *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* with its heroine-alcoholic. If Doreen Clarke and Fay Mokotow had further pursued the notion that women are responsible for their own destruction, something they obviously had in mind, the play might have been able to sustain itself.

Amphi Theatre's The Arbitration

A worthwhile experience

THE ARBITRATION

by Anthony Barclay

The Arbitration by Menander. Text completed and translated into Modern Greek by Tassos Roussos. Amphi-Theatre Company. Athens at the Theatre Royal, Sydney. Opened 30 April 1981.
Director: **Spyros Evangelatos**. Sets and costumes: **Giorgos Patsas**. Music: **Yannis Markopoulos**.
Cast: Carion: **Elias Asproudis**. Onesimos: **Dimitris Kataitfos**. Smicrines: **Kostas Tsianos**. Chaerestratos: **Kostas Kapodistrias**. Simias: **Panos Skourolakos**. Syriscos: **Michalis Mitroussis**. Dans: **Giorgos Tsidimis**. Habroula: **Ilias Lambridou**. Pamphile: **Zoe Rigopoulou**. Charisios: **Vassilis Gousis**. Sophrone: **Rika Salaki**.
Interludes: **Leda Tassopoulou, Anny Loulou, Melina Roteli**.
(Professional)

Menander's classic comedy is the second offering this year from the Cladan Cultural Exchange Institute — the first, *The Liberation of Skopje*, was one of the hits of January's Festival of Sydney. *Skopje* was powerful stuff indeed and will probably leave a greater impact. But little is to be gained by comparing these two theatre experiences. *The Arbitration* was quietly powerful, at moments it took flight and one kept wishing there had been more of these moments. Its effect was cumulative in the particular sense that one was left with certain potent after images as opposed to a constant dazzle during performance. To a certain extent this was the intended strategy but, at least on opening night there were occasions where things did not mesh. Some of the scene change-overs were less than polished, a cart caught the stage cloth several times or refused to behave as it rounded corners and so on. These were simply hitches that one took in one's stride.

But there were more pressing problems: the modern Greek left a lot of us at sea and this is not intended as an implied confession of philistinism. Simply, it seemed more the actors' difficulties (or more correctly, uncertainties) in guaging their audience. That the first three scenes were played as 'classical' styles played no small part in this. Indeed, the audience did not seem to 'warm' as a group until the two final scenes — and by this I do not simply mean audience 'laughter'. One sensed up to a point — but only up to a point — something of what Brook's actors must have felt during various of their performances during their Sahara odyssey.

As to the production proper: Tassos Roussos and Spyros Evangelatos have sought to establish Menander's influence on European theatre, especially certain periods, over some two thousand years. It's the kind of claim that could keep one at a seminar longer than one planned to stay. The relationship between Menander, Meredith and Thackeray, and Victorian melodrama is no doubt there — but it all seems finally academic. The point is Menander's influences are diverse, direct and indirect, but the substance is the universality. Fortunately the production was neither overtly academic nor overly given to period for the sake of period. The dramatic strategy was to structure five scenes over five distinct theatre periods and to develop interrelated patterns from period to period. In this sense the production worked reasonably well.

Those periods were: Greece 300BC, the

'high' Commedia dell'arte of Italy, the theatre of Moliere, the English nineteenth century melodrama and finally the Greek cinema of the 1950's. Styles were played to this effect and visually the whole thing worked rather well. The whole piece was linked by a series of interludes three peasant women trekking across the sands of time collecting in their cart the masks and costumes of humanity as it played out its folly century after century. The most stunning moments here were at the beginning and end of the production when the full cast joined the parade. The final moment as cast stripped off their twentieth century trappings to don non specific peasant garb and begin the journey once more was especially well done. It was one of those moments of theatre that while rather obvious in intent had powerful simplicity.

But (and this may very well be my problem) the whole production relied too heavily on the verbal despite all its colour and stylistics. This is not a fault in principle but it became glaringly obvious when movement and gesture lacked precision, lacked full content. I found this especially so in scenes two and three (Commedia to Moliere) where the rather obvious contrasts of pace, gesture and antic seemed to beg for development. One had the impression that it was all too rushed. (I was rather curious that while the programme suggested the length of performance was two and a half hours the actual time was closer to ninety minutes — misprint or was the piece extensively cut?)

The final two scenes offered the audience very familiar territory and from that point pace and delivery blended very well. It is difficult to select performances here but I think unquestionably the evening went to Michalis Mitroussis and Dimitri Katalifos as the servants. In brief a worthwhile experience.

Dame Edna plummets

AN EVENING'S INTERCOURSE

by Andrew Hardy

An Evening's Intercourse with Barry Humphries. Regent Theatre Sydney NSW. Opened 23 April 1981. Director **Ian Tasker**. Producer **Dennis Smith**. With **Barry Humphries**. Piano **Sybil Graham**. *(Professional)*

La Stupedna is back, topping a line-up of Barry Humphries' characters which, bar one, are the same as his *Isn't It Pathetic* show of three years ago.

What has happened to our "widely liked" superstar? Where is the freshness, the incisiveness and perspicacity of the master humorist? Where is the thrust and deep penetration we expect of the satirist?

Barry Humphries as Dame Edna

Disturbingly prophetic is a full page ad in the programme showing a grieving family holding a newspaper with the headline "Dame Edna Plummets". But even that is too dramatic, rather this *Evening's Intercourse* fulfills the programme subtitle "...handcrafted middle-of-the-road entertainment".

The characters have become caricatures. Sir Les finds himself belching, farting and swearing his way through a threadbare, shaggy dog sketch which involves cheese, fingers and the reasons behind a smile on Malcolm Fraser's face. Lance Boyle, trade union leader, should be surgically removed as soon as possible. The single point in this send-up failed to sustain the endless telephone calls of the last show and has changed not a whit in this.

The same applies to Sandy Stone whose wraith hovered over *Isn't It Pathetic*. There the sheer range of the "recognition humour" sustained his spirit, but "the ongoing ruminations of (this) revenant" have lost his sharp observation of detail. Affection dominates wit.

The new creation, Phil Philby, is a recondite film maker, shoved into the public eye by huge subsidies (when will Humphries stop slinging at that Aunt Sally?) and before us to receive his Golden Goanna award. If burlesque is to hit home and be more than empty point scoring its object must not be underestimated. And the Australian film industry is presently above what Humphries' (and Williamson in *Celluloid Heroes*) gives it credit for.

And so to Edna, with whom lay the promise of satisfaction after the foreplay characters. Once again the experience was limpening. The same old get-the-audience jokes (including taking their shoes and getting them to look idiotic tending a barbecue) and then on with the gladdies. Is happiness a bigger gladdie gun?

Barry Oakley made the telling remark of *Isn't It Pathetic* that "the gladioli are hurled not to but at the audience: the people leaving the theatre are carrying arrows, not flowers." Here, though the artillery may be bigger, the charge is damp.

We have been spoiled by the "ongoing development" of Edna. Just as we expect climax she seems to have reached menopause. For the first time the edge is blunted of the haranguing, ridiculing, sarcastic Australian matriarch. Perhaps Humphries has been away too long (compare the freshness and brilliance of his one-off British television show) to notice that here stock fashions have faded and old stereotypes blurred. Less kindly one may wonder if patronising the colonial outpost may have seeped through to Dame Edna's creator and if he hasn't come to believe that tired old material will do.

Cool but beautiful

OCCUPATIONS

by Don Batchelor

Occupations by **Trevor Griffiths** La Boite Theatre Brisbane Qld Opened April 24 1981
Director **Jeremy Ridgman**, Designer **Andrew Speirs**
Lighting Designer **Len Bauska**
Cast Kabak **Tony Phelan**, Gramsci **Stephen Preston**, Angelica, **Christine Hoepper** Polya **Penny Bundy**, Valletta **Hugh Taylor**, D'Avanza **Keith Avent**, Terrini **George Volk**, Libertini **Graham Thomas**, Porter **Barry Child**
(Amateur)

The plot, as the saying goes, thickens but not in Trevor Griffiths' *Occupations*, and that is the main problem

It is Italy 1920, and a Communist inspired occupation of factories in several northern industrial cities has been in progress for some months The socialist central government stands by, unwilling to move against its own constituency waiting for what it sees as an inevitable collapse of worker control Industrialists are starving the factories of raw materials The army, in position to be mobilised against the workers, cannot be relied upon in a crisis Peasant support for the communists is growing Recognising the seeds of revolution the fledgling Soviet regime sends up "agent", Kabak, to urge the local party officials into an uprising Kabak holes up in a bourgeois hotel in Turin to work on Antonio Gramsci, the key leader in this key city

To this highly theatrical political brew Griffiths adds some personal spice Kabak's mistress, a former Czarist countess, is dying in the hotel room of a cancer of the womb, his highly pragmatic way of dealing both with these political and personal crises finally brought to confront the loving care of Gramsci for his worker comrades Will he sacrifice them to the cause?

Since the antagonists in this volatile situation are a Russian and an Italian, we might expect high drama Not so — indeed the evening is oddly bloodless and passionless, after a leisurely exposition, the main confrontation between the two men is dealt with and resolved in a single, very civilised scene

The effect is partly the result of Jeremy Ridgman's carefully modulated production, which allows the actors to wallow in personally meaningful moments — a studied change of clothes, some highly considered entrances and exits by the servant Polya with attendant side-long glances between her and Kabak and so on It all slows the early pace and sacrifices the tension of great events outside the room rather than focussing them intensely in that small space

Stephen Preston (Gramsci) in La Boite's Confusions

Cool though it all becomes, it is a beautiful production, not least in Andrew Speir's elegant design, so tastefully lit by Len Bauska

The sense of team is also evident in the acting, though some of the fringe characters require highly skillful cameo performances which are out of the reach of the actors concerned The central group, Tony Phelan as Kabak Christine Hoepper as Angelica and Penny Bundy as Polya, give very creditable readings, but the highlight of the evening is an excellent performance by Stephen Preston as Gramsci

It is so wonderfully organic every minute gesture with a cigarette is part of a whole and the dramatic statement is infused by warm intelligence and total understanding His Gramsci is an intellectual whose love for people for once achieves that rare combination of purity and simplicity Consequently it is irresistable

The play, the production, and the performance together achieve a remarkable tribute to the memory of a man which will live in the mind for a long time.

Sharing extremities

AUSTRALIAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

by Gus Worby

For eighteen days in April the second ADF, under the auspices of the Association of Community Theatres, was in town — kitted out with topper, cane and a nugget shine. Forty-odd companies, twelve from interstate, presented more than 200 performances professional and amateur; big league and little, temper democratic, bias . radical with a left tendency.

The image of formal get-up and fancy footwork which distinguished the logo was interestingly at odds with at least some of the content. The programme wasn't quite so "innocent" and a good thing too. All but the most conservative amateur companies were "having a go" at the substance and disbursement of our inheritance.

Despite the routine disclaimer on p. 81 of the Festival Brochure (does not necessarily endorse, etc) this critical stance must reflect a programming policy. But a committee has to choose from existing options and clearly theatre in the capital cities, suburbs and regions is far less comfortable or rather far more disturbed than it was eighteen months ago, and far more determined to say so. The absence of the big regional companies (except the STC) was, in this respect, a blessing because it provided the opportunity for a once-off season virtually free from the inevitable halter of subscription. The festival, then, provided a fine opportunity for the theatre extremes to share their extremities, with precision, imagination, skill and vision. To an impressive list of acknowledged successes an extremely moving *Banquet of Vipers*, *Standard Operating Procedure*, *Such is Life* (fine work) and *Buckley's* one must add Troupe's *Suburban Mysteries*. In performance and conception, this piece was up there with the best of them. Somehow, Keith Gallasch managed to weave strands of murder mystery, detective thriller, sci-fi, and political didacticism into a horror story of suburban wasteland. Woodville and Findon as a battleground for suburban guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary reactionaries? Yes indeed, and no joke — though there was no shortage of humour and irony.

Gallasch has invented Quinn — a 26-year-old crazy — who martyrs himself and in so doing gives the suburbs a definition and a code of heroism and treachery. As a member of a radical party known as the Peril, he perpetrates solo and unapproved raids on unprotected symbols of multinational presence — two fast food outlets. For doing so, he draws out the other suburbanites — cops, joggers, former classmates, shopkeepers — who fight for or bow to the opposition, the Wing. Out of anonymity and a blinds-drawn isolation, emerges a desperate sub-culture with its own fugitive poetry, and mythology. The twist which makes the production fascinating is that Quinn dies in the opening moments of the piece and is "zapped" back to life in order to recount in flashes and episodes his apotheosis.

The piece, with its constant musical pulse and 3-screen montage of photographs, misses neither cue nor cause.

In contrast to the freedom of design and athleticism of performance which liberates *Suburban Mysteries*, the Stage Company's production at the Space is hidebound, locked into its language and design. *Death of Danko*, by Ken Ross, deals with the last days of Maxim Gorky. Here, too, is a battle for individual and collective right between the popular spiritual source personified, and the impersonal power of the State. But the juxtaposition of age, infirmity, and indomitable spirit and artistic cunning does not yield the same dramatic payload.

The ageing figure of Gorky provides a solid, but barely mobile, centrepiece. The play, then, is dominated by contrived exits and arrivals. Gorky treks from the rarefied and inviolable grey white environment of his study to the homely surroundings of his apartment by way of a narrow ramp. In turn, a second curved slipway descends to the pit — the lower depths of imagination incarnate. Caught between the land of ideals and the knowledge of life drained to the dregs, the "stormy petrel" of Russian folk literature rewrites his revered play *The Zikovs* in order to condemn the regime in which he believed and which used him for its own propagandist purposes.

The strength of the production is John Noble. His staying power is impressive and, in the absence of genuine character

Christine Anderson and David Kirk in Suburban Mysteries

nourishment, it feeds and encourages his colleagues. In fairness to both subject matter and the production, it should be noted that the audience observed the event with respect and genuine interest, and found in the exhumed and interpolated exerpts of Gorky's work great wit and wisdom.

Excellent performances

PYGMALION
BUCKLEY'S!

by Michael Morley/State Rep.

Pygmalion by G.B. Shaw. State Theatre Company of SA. Playhouse, Adelaide. Opened May 1 1981.
Director: **Kevin Palmer**, Designer: **Sue Russell**, Lighting: **Nigel Levings**, Stage Manager: **Bev MacInnes**.
Cast: Freddy: **Philip Quast**, Eliza: **Deborah Little**, Pickering: **John Edmund**, Higgins: **Dennis Olsen**, Mrs Pearce: **Wendy Madigan**, Doolittle: **Henry Salter**, with **Susan Lyons**, **Myra Noblet**, **Tom Considine**, **Di Miardjieff**, **Paul Anderson**, **Philip Rehn**, **B.J. Cole**.
(Professional)

Buckley's devised by **David Allen** and **Arlette Taylor**, Book: **David Allen**, Lyrics: **Nick Enright**, Music: **Glenn Henrich**. State Theatre Company of SA. Playhouse of Adelaide. Opened April 1 1981.
Director, choreographer: **Arrelle Taylor**, Musical Director: **Glenn Henrich**, Designer: **Ken Wilby**, Lighting: **Nigel Levings**, Stage Manager: **Malcolm Leech**.
Cast: **Vanessa Downing**, **B-J Cole**, **Tom Considine**, **Fonty Hopkins**, **James Laurie**, **Don Rosella**, **Lagmar Taylor**, **Philip Quast**, **Justine Saunders**, **John Saunders**, **Margaret Davis**, **Sue Lyons**, **Nick Enright**, **Joseph Scaglio**, **Kelvin Harman**, Musicians: **Glenn Henrich**, **Jerry Wesley**, **Laurie Kennedy**, **Steve Russell**.
(Professional)

It is all too easy to sneer at Shaw and dismiss him as irrelevant, out-of-date, self-centred, heavy on ideas and light on action. The test of his plays, perhaps more so than for any other 20th Century dramatist, is their performance. Wallace Stevens hit the problem neatly in a letter written in 1951. "I stopped reading Shaw years ago — what he was all about, after all, was himself, and the only structure he left us was his own image. Of course, he was always enjoyable in the theatre, as distinct from the reading of him ..."

Kevin Palmer's production of *Pygmalion* certainly vindicates this remark. It is well cast, well spoken — essential to Shaw — and distinguished by three authoritative performances: Denis Olsen's Higgins, Debbie Little's Eliza and John Edmund's Pickering. The play depends for its tension and momentum on this trio and, though there were moments on the first night when the ensemble playing could have been tighter, these were small flaws in an otherwise effective production.

Olsen, in particular, was in good form, avoiding the pitfalls of feyness and pat flippancy in his reading of the part — though I would suggest that Shaw's tongue-in-cheek lines are pointed enough to do without the added visual touch. The odd bulge in the cheek after a particularly neat witticism was really too much of the 'nod's-being-as-good-as-the-wink-to-a-blind-man' (or however it goes). These minor objections aside, his Higgins was a figure of fun and earnestness, demonstrating in his treatment of Eliza the power he is too wary of displaying towards Mrs Pearce or his overbearing mother. For *Pygmalion* is as much a play about power games as it is about education, and as all education has to do ultimately with the power of knowledge, the links are hardly remarkable. What Olsen managed, though, was to persuade the audience that Higgins' apparent imperviousness derived neither from armoured sensitivity nor from complete callousness but was part of a behavioural pattern that could be altered — just, in fact, as he manages to alter Eliza's speech patterns. (And while on the question of speech, any performer who wishes to study how to eat an apple and deliver his lines with complete audibility should take lessons from Olsen. As neat a piece of business as I've seen on stage.)

Debbie Little's Eliza was a joy: the accent cutting through the measured tones of Olsen and Edmund like a circular saw through cabbage, the performer's walk and manner confronting without being overbearingly and crassly aggressive. The transformation was well-handled, so that Eliza's composure and stillness in the final act seemed both admirable and somewhat artificial, given the natural energy and emotion that had earlier been on display. John Edmund made Pickering a figure of deceney and good sense. There was a feeling

State Theatre Company's Pygmalion

that, at times, he could have favoured a slightly less weighty delivery of the lines, but this is a minor objection when set beside the merits of the characterisation. There was no pompous clubman with a decent strain, but an intriguing, if slightly less sharply observed offshoot of Roebuck Ramsden in *Man and Superman*.

The supporting roles were mostly in keeping with the overall high standard. Particularly good were Mary Ward's Mrs Higgins, who showed clearly where Henry gets his tyrannical traits from, Philip Quast's vague, yet not vapid, Freddie and Wendy Madigan's composed Mrs Pearce. Sue Russell's design seemed simple, effective and functional and, without ever drawing unnecessary attention to itself, underlined the sense of style which was so precisely reflected in the three central performances.

The same could not, alas, be said of the month's other offering by the STC — David Allen's and Ariette Taylor's *Buckley's*. Set, music, script, performances and direction all seemed to be going along opposite lines and, though there were individual strengths, the production and play seemed over-emphatic and hyperbolic. It's all very well to talk of the importance of the visual in the theatre, but when one works with a text, the visual has to be married with an attention to the spoken word and with the readiness occasionally to trust its power and appropriateness. I suspect I'm not the only one to find David Allen's script puzzling and ill-defined, but I did also get the impression that the direction was equally at fault. There was a confusion of styles in both performance and writing — naturalistic one minute, verging on the quasi-hieratic the next, sliding off into copa-cabana (or is it banana?) I'm-flying-down-to-Rio the next. I know, for example, that the old woman was a grandmother and a theatrical device. But did she really need to play the pianola as well? And what did the gang and the radical action party have to do with each other, let alone with the plot? As for the bra-and-panty-clad suburban housewives chasing Alfredo, the sexy Spanish gardener, round the humid greenery — well, I know I'd really like to believe in fairies at the bottom of a greenhouse garden, especially if they are as inviting as Sue Lyons and Margaret Davis, but fact and fiction seemed just a little far apart on this occasion.

However, if there were serious weaknesses in script and direction, there were many compensations in the performances themselves and the energy and vitality the company brought to their song-and-dance numbers. Being unable myself even to vault a fence without the benefit of a ten yard run-up and four pairs of helping hands, I tend towards fawning admiration of anyone who can shin up scaffolding or leap over bars with the vigour and total lack of concern for physical injury displayed by all the performers. The set looked like a performer's nightmare: various layers of scaffolding with the band on top and the actors in between, sometimes in offices, sometimes on the streets, sometimes even in that garden-nursery. The sheer logistics of getting on and off in the right order without breaking a limb must have caused plenty of head-scratching, but there was little uncertainty in the performances, which were snappy, exuberant and vigorous. The gang members — especially Don Rosella and Emily Hopkins — were suitably out front and, although the solo singing was occasionally insecure, the chorus numbers were bright and accurate. Nick Enright's lyrics were sharp and well-fashioned, two in particular — "Rock and Roll Bludger" and "1931" — being first rate. And though Glen Henrich's music was effective and very well played, I was left with a sneaking feeling that Enright himself might possibly have provided slightly more appropriate settings. Though when he could have found the time I don't quite know. He'd probably have needed to jot them down in between appearances as Stuart, the self-made, self-centred saviour of the kids.

This was a clever and controlled characterisation, matched only by Philip Quast's splendid policeman and Vanessa Downing's rich, yet not overdone, old woman. Quast's performance was the highlight of the show: a smugly domineering display of authority which showed again this performer's impressive potential. After the subtleness of the portrayal of the relationship between the two boys in *A Hard God*, I was unprepared for the sureness and coarseness of his reading of this part. Without it, the production would have seemed much more confused and lacking in cohesion.

Tom Considine, Don Rosella, B.J. Cole, Ingmar Taylor in Buckley's!

Vanessa Downing and Don Rosella in Buckley's!

Chilling competence

PETE McGYNTY AND THE DREAMTIME

by Cathy Peake

Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime by **Keith Michell**. Melbourne Theatre Company. Athenaeum Theatre Vic. Opened April 8 1981.
Director **John Sumner**, Designer **Anne Fraser**; Music **Bruce Smeaton**, Choreography **Joe Talona**, Lighting **Jamie Lewis**.
Cast **Keith Michell**, **Irene Inescort**, **Peter Curtin**, **David Letch**, **Andrew Martin**, **Tim Hughes**, **Robert Essex**, **Rona McLeod**, **Rhonda Cressey**, **Celia de Burgh**, **Babs McMillan**, **Sydney Conabere**, **Anne Scott Pendlebury**, **Douglas Hedge**, **Linden Wilkinson**, **Sally Cahill**, **Robert Hewett**, **Anne Phelan**, **Frank Thring**, **Simon Chilvers**.
(Professional)

Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime is a curious mixture of clever staging effects and a rather thin and meandering script. Chiefly a vehicle for Keith Michell — who is here in the multiple roles of playwright, singer and lead actor — its themes and structure is loosely based on Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, the last of his poetic dramas.

In fact what Michell has done is to transpose the Norwegian original to an Australian setting, complete with aboriginal folk legends, an Australian vernacular and a rainbow serpent who replaces Ibsen's Great Boyg.

The effect of this Australian dreamtime is sporadic and confusing. The play is really a loosely connected series of episodes or vignettes — its general and frequently repeated thesis being that one can't be free until one has freed oneself from the constructions of the ego. But where Ibsen's work thrives on its dramatisation of a makeshift reality, here a seemingly deliberate confusion of the real and the supernatural is used to propel Pete through his chaotic progress from young man to middle-aged millionaire to old man full of remorse. Worse, the whole text is delivered in rhyming couplets — also a legacy of the original.

Needless to say Pete occupies centre stage for most of the evening. And, notwithstanding Michell's ability to transform the rhyming couplets into a semblance of normal speech, and to project a kind of engaging ingenue warmth far too often the whole breaks down into a recitation of doggerel. For instance, back at home and now a disillusioned old man, Pete exclaims: "Life doesn't give you a second go, my empire was here and I didn't know." At other times, the rhyming couplets simply sound quaint.

In fact, *Pete McGynty* is a farrago of styles and improbabilities. It really comes alive in the dance sequences, the wedding and when Frank Thring hits the stage in the multiple roles of King of the Bunyips, as a Russian who looks rather like Brezhnev and as a drunken and dissipated swagman.

All of the large cast, with the exception of Keith Michell, are required to play multiple roles as mourners, lunatics, Krishna devotees and Nabudi. In the main they do so with great aplomb, but they all suffer under the weight of long passages of tedious and colourless dialogue.

John Sumner's direction of this unwieldy narrative and the high-tech ambience of its staging are among the most remarkable achievements of the evening.

Anne Fraser's set uses a lot of galvanised iron and its general effect is something like a cross between an Australian Breughel and the surrealists. It is full of surprises such as the tree stump which flowers into a palm tree, and an unforgettable plane crash during which Pete McGynty is unceremoniously lowered from the flashing lights of the cockpit into a rubber life-raft on stage.

But the brilliant pyrotechnics and the haunting music of Bruce Smeaton are never really able to rescue a tale so steeped in a hotchpotch of mythology and cliched Australian references that it fails to have much point.

Whether the constrictions of Ibsen's original have proved to be too severe for the material is hard to say. In the end this production has a chilling competence, but none of the magic and horror of true nightmares and none of those privileged moments which usually attend the much heralded voyage of self-discovery.

Rona McLeod (Rainbow Woman) and Keith Michell (Pete McGynty) in MTC's Pete McGynty and the Dreamtime. *Photo: David Parker.*

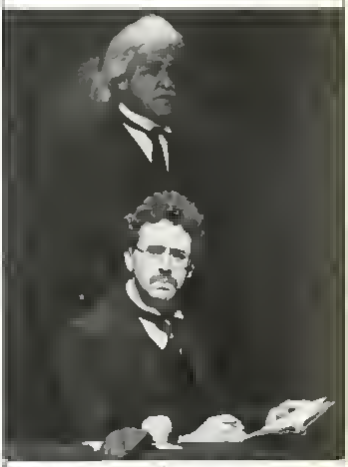
Beautiful irony

EINSTEIN

by Colin Duckworth

Einstein by **Ron Elisha**. Melbourne Theatre Company, Russell Street. Melbourne. Opened 21 April 1981.
Director **Bruce Myles**, Designer **Richard Prins**, Lighting designer **James Lewis**.
Cast: Einstein **Frederick Parslow** (18 April 1955) **Gary Down** (1919 to 1945) and **Roger Oakley** (1919 to 1905).
(Professional)

The sure sense of form and theatrical elegance that marks Ron Elisha's text is splendidly matched by Bruce Myles's direction, greatly aided by Richard Prins's set (which simply but powerfully evokes the fact that the whole action is emanating



Frederick Parslow (Einstein) and Roger Oakley (Einstein) in the MTC's Einstein.

and radiating from the brain of Einstein on his death-bed), and sustained by the cast, above all by Frederick Parslow as the old Einstein

The formula Elisha has created in order to present his formidably difficult subject — the moral dilemmas and agonies of a genius whose ideas were and are well beyond the capacities of most of us to understand — is highly effective it is a series of interrogations between the three selves of Albert Einstein the young worker at the Swiss Patent Office dealing with such zany pataphysical inventions as cheese-flavoured nitroglycerine for use in mousetraps, the mid-career scientist reviled and revered, and the retired atomic researcher trying to cope with his anguish of guilt for having opened Pandora's A-box.

There are moments of beautiful irony in these confrontations between the dedicated scientist, passionate only about his work, and the old man who rebukes him for loving humanity but nobody in particular However, one could have hoped that the interrogation would be more two- or three-way Whereas old Einstein is constantly putting the younger ones on the spot, more of the old man's wisdom could have been elicited by means of equally painful prodding by the younger ones This would have helped Ron Elisha to avoid a certain prosiness and over-long rhetoric that develops in the second act

It is a tribute to Roger Oakley and Gary Down, who are after all, not assisted by any great disparity in age between their respective Einsteins, that they never allowed the basic sameness of their roles or their assumed German-Jewish accents to become tiresome The youthful vigour and eagerness of Mr Oakley's Einstein was adroitly developed by Mr Down into eagerness and seriousness — with eager single-mindedness as the unifying characteristic which the old Einstein sees as the source of weakness, since it cut him off from the sense of moral responsibility for the likely outcome of his nuclear researches until it was too late

This is what Ron Elisha is concerned with, not so much the particular achievement of Einstein (which enables him to skirt round the problem of having to explain General Relativity and Quantum Theory, not noted for their dramatic potential) but the moral responsibility of *all* scientists to foresee the political and military misuse to which their research can be put To this end, he has to make Einstein appear to take on himself full responsibility for Hiroshima I do not know if he did do this (or whether this is part of the fifty per cent of the script which Mr Elisha tells me he invented), but it is perfectly plausible in view of Einstein's known concern for humanity and his childlike approach to political matters

However, even if one admits Mr Elisha's right to use the experience of Einstein as a hook on which to hang a drama about every scientist's moral responsibility, and even though it is a matter of concern to us all that Einstein unwittingly (no, he realised it as far back as 1943) caused the Doomsday clock to lurch dangerously close to midnight, one may still have reservations about the author's wisdom in sacrificing political detail in favour of religious overtones For his Einstein constantly draws a parallel between himself and Moses who (according to Mr Elisha but not according to the Jerusalem or New English Bibles) caused the death of his brother Aaron by smiting a rock (or, to complete the pun Mr Elisha plays on, *ein stein* a stone)

On the purely dramatic level, however, Mr Elisha is to be congratulated on his treatment of a seemingly intractable subject Not only does he give us just enough of Einstein's theories for innumerate idiots like me to comprehend (including the Stoppardesque idea Einstein stated in 1912 that time must move more slowly round fat people — pure 'Pataphysics again!), but he also makes his potentially undramatic hero hold the spectator by his anguish and (how much we owe to the Jews for their sense of comic irony) his humour "Don't you believe in the Jewish spirit?" — "I don t have to it's the Arabs who do " The world is full of Germans of one race or another " The challenge Mr Elisha had to face in placing a Professor of Theoretical Physics centre stage was so much greater than for, say, Galileo, Maurie Curie or Pasteur; not even a telescope or a milk bottle to focus our attention on To have written such a moving, thought-provoking *and* entertaining play is no mean achievement

Love letters in the sand

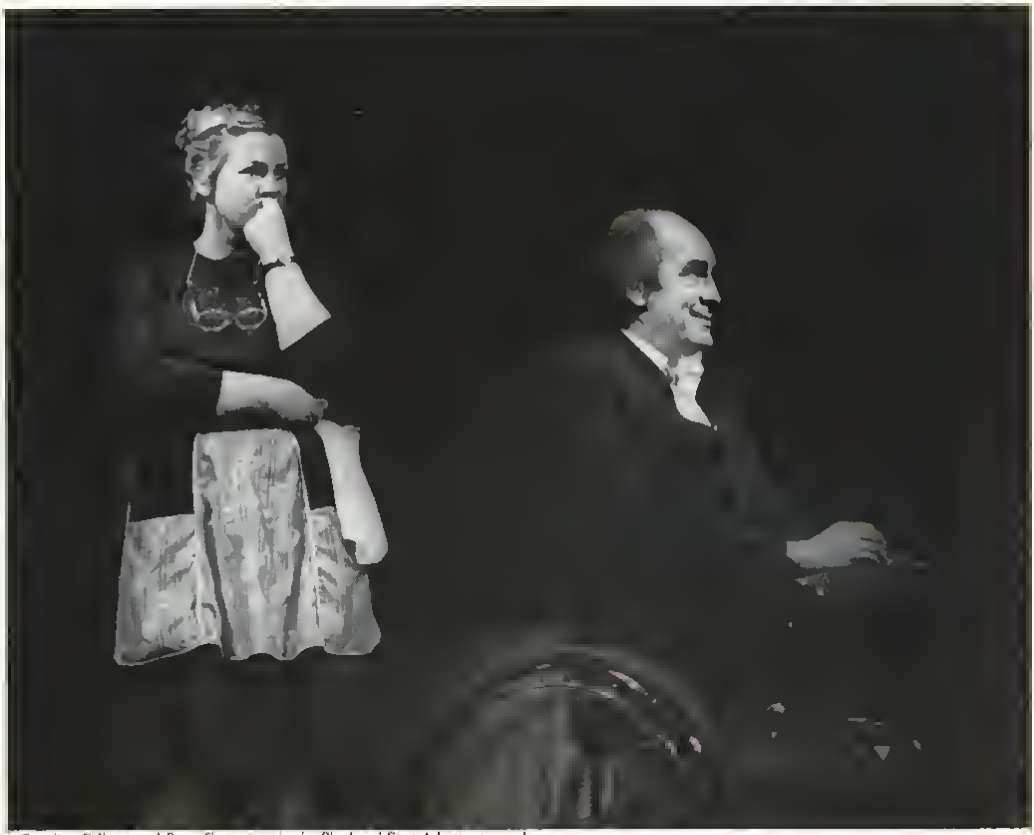
I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE

by Suzanne Spunner

I Sent a Letter to My Love by Bernice Rubens The Playbox Theatre Company Downstairs The Playbox Theatre Melbourne Opened April 29 1981
Director **Malcolm Robertson** Design Lighting, Sound **John Beckett** Costumes **Gerry Nixon** Set Construction **Brian Holmes** Stage Manager **Yvonne Hockey**
Cast Amy Evans **Caroline Gillmer**, Stan Evans her brother **Peter Cummins** Gwyneth Price **Gerda Nicolson**, Huw Price her brother **Robin Cuming** Miss Morgan **Adele Lewin**

Welsh playwright Bernice Rubens' *I Sent a Letter to My Love* is an exquisitely crafted and compassionate piece of theatre that cannot but prove to be an emotionally satisfying experience for its audiences In fact the only thing which could go against it being a box office hit in the larger Downstairs Playbox Theatre is its length and attendant long-windedness It is warm, funny and deeply moving without being mawkish Set in the south Welsh seaside town of Porthcawl it traces over a period of six months the unrequited search for love of a middle-aged spinster and her crippled bachelor brother through the pages of the personal columns of the local newspaper —

" fond music and chapel, view matrimony " Not only are they unable to find the woman and the man to change their lives they are barely able to express their love an concern for one another From the outset the play is set on a collision course with sentimentality, however both Rubens and director, Malcolm Robertson veer away at the last minute — Rubens achieves this by moving away from naturalistic exposition into the more stylised modes of soliloquy and story-telling whenever the slush is imminent Robertson kept the acting contained and low-key, and overall this approach proved an efficient and sufficient brake In moments, however underplaying worked against and inhibited the resonances and imagery of Rubens' more introspective and formal passages I felt a similar restraint at work in the realisation of the darker, existentialist imagery in John Beckett's design The three-roomed interior of the Evans' house was accurately if rather mundanely created Supporting the exposed centre of the house was a raft-like structure that merged at the edges into a pier cum sea-wall about which were perched a number of seagulls in positions of frozen flight Within the text seagulls had a literal reference and also served as a metaphor for Amy's life, I only wished that they had been larger than life, and that the design in general had been bolder and visually more



Caroline Gillmer and Peter Cummings in the Playbox I Sent A Letter to my Love

evocative in its recreation of this other reality

Caroline Gillmer and Peter Cummins were well cast in the leading roles as the sister and brother and the scenes between them were virtuoso performances In one Stan forces Amy to name him as he is, and call him a cripple, eventually she does and he in turn names her an old maid The exercise in speaking the unspeakable turns into a game, a schoolyard chant and finally a passionate peasant-like dance — she is clomping about in her brogues and sensible skirt, while he whirls with crazy delight in his wheelchair. The two actors were evenly matched but Amy's was the more demanding role as she carried the introspective weight of the play, but it was in the final scenes as Amy begins to break down when Stan decides to marry, that Caroline Gillmer revealed the extent of her command of the character Among the supporting actors, Gerda Nicolson as Gwyneth, Amy's friend and later Stan's fiancee, proved an hilarious foil for Amy's growing rebellion

I Set a Letter to My Love is one of those plays where you quickly find there's little more you can say that hasn't already been said by the playwright — "the final rejection is death of the imagination". Its ultimate commercial strength lies in the fact that it could offend no-one, and that it is not meek or vapid in the process

Games with scissors

STEEL CITY SISTER

by Suzanne Spunner

Steel City Sister by **Joy Wiedersatz** The Australian Performing Group The Back Theatre The Pram Factory, Melbourne Opened April 22, 1981
Director **Denis Moore**; Designers **Peter King** and **Michael Anderson** Lighting **Richard Mackay-Scollay** and **Ruth Constantine** Sound **Greg Pickhaver**

Cast Nina **Nicole Le Compte** Viv **Val Levkowicz**; Slug **Peter Hosking**, Mrs Hopkins **Mavis Smith**, Freaky **Danny Nash** Mandy **Jackie Kerin**, Grady **Robin Anson**, Blue **Richard Healy**

Wollongong playwright Joy Wiedersatz won the recent APG playwriting competition with *Steel City Sister* and it is easy to see why it commanded the group's attention, for the play offers an uncompromising view of the raw underbelly of present day Australia — the unemployed youth of industrial suburbia It probes the doled out subculture with merciless accuracy and shirks nothing that it uncovers The characters and dialogue are acutely observed and toughly portrayed In style Wiedersatz treads a knife edge between brutal naturalism and surrealist fantasy, though as the play progresses it becomes increasingly difficult to discern when a shift into another reality has occurred My doubts and hesitations about the play hinge on these moments, as their interpretation radically affects how it is read politically

Steel City Sister could be seen as a vicious

Val Levkowicz (Viv) and Nicole Le Compte (Nina) in Steel City Sister

attack on feminism, in its portrayal of two sisters, Nina and Viv who invoke patriarchal oppression to justify their cold blooded homicides and meanwhile appear to collude in the ultra sexist behaviour of the various boyfriends. To see the play in this light is to see their behaviour as no more and, no less than drug-crazed Mansonist revenge on the society that has shunned them and to see their feminism as a gratuitous and repetitive diatribe. On this reading the play reinforces a disturbing and reactionary politic.

However the work is dense and ambiguous enough to be read in another way whereby the drugs, the violence and the feminism, are seen as the symptoms and products of a more profound and disturbing social critique. Certainly there are enough cues in the writing and in the direction of this production to substantiate a more complex non-naturalistic interpretation, but in so doing I am left with a nagging doubt, that I may wish this to be the case because I am loathe to cope with the extent of the violence, literally. While obviously one cannot look to playwrights for answers, one does expect a concrete sense of the possibility of change from one who is concerned and politically aware enough to tackle a subject like this in the first place. And on this count by the end of the play when the sisters have terrorised their conventional innocent pregnant sister to death and have delivered her baby by caesarean section with a breadknife one would be hard pressed to argue that this was the act of women oppressed. For it undeniably seemed to have shifted into the area of women possessed to a degree that no amount of social change could ameliorate. Certainly one could extend the argument into the relationship between social oppression and madness but in this case it is too glib an answer. I came away from the play extremely distressed by the desperation it portrayed and at the same time frustrated because I hadn't really seen where it came from and where else it could have gone.

Wiedersatz's considerable strengths as a writer are revealed in the simpler and relatively lighter, more naturalistic moments in the first half of the play as the relationship between Nina and Viv is explored in their attitudes to their parents, their other straight sister, their landlady, their surfie flatmate and their boyfriends. The play moves along with a furious energy and is full of brilliant black comic moments which in the second half transform into Gothic excess. Had it not been for the overall strength and detail of the acting and the taut direction it could have foundered and become banal and simply melodramatic.

Among an excellent and consistent cast Nicole Le Compte's Nina, Val Levkowicz's Viv and Jackie Kerin's Mandy stand out and they were equally matched by the male cameo roles — Peter Hosking's Slug and Danny Nash's Freaky. Peter King and Michael Anderson's design of a suburban interior was rich and stylish, and had a depth of field and detail rarely achieved in the Back Theatre of the Pram.

Steel City Sister is a difficult and challenging play that touches on the grimmest realities through some bizarre and compelling theatrical images. Nina and Viv's cabaret style duo act with choreographed flailing crutches, was one of the most memorable. Denis Moore's direction was precise and subtle but there were times when I wished for explicit decisions as to the 'meaning' of particular scenes. Joy Wiedersatz is a writer to watch with interest, and in my case, some apprehension.

THEATRE/WA

High level of enjoyment

PAL JOEY

by Margot Luke

Pal Joey by Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart and John O'Hara National Theatre Company Playhouse Perth WA Opened March 31 1981
Director **Terrence Clarke**, Designer **Tony Tripp**, Musical Director **Derek Bond**, Choreographer **Colin Griffith**, Lighting **Duncan Ord**, Stage Manager **Richard Hartley**, **George Tsousis**
Cast Joey **Robert van Mackelenberg**, Mike Spears **Dennis Schulz**; Louis **Ross Coll**, Vera **Rosemary Barr** with **Jenny Dunstan**, **Sally Sander**, **Maggie Wilde West**, **Jenny Vuletic**, **Michelle Mead**, **Danny Harford**, **Ivan King**, **Alice Oale**, **Julia Moody**, **James Beattie**, **George Tsousis**, **Shane Mrland**
Musicians **Roger Garrood**, **Lionel Davis**, **Margaret Fenn**, **Bruce Herriman**, **Derek Bond**, **Ian Williams**, **Jack Knight**
(Professional)

The fact that some of the principal actors can't really sing very well doesn't seem to matter in Terence Clarke's lively production of the Rogers and Hart musical *Pal Joey*. I'm told it's the first production in Australia, which strikes me as remarkable. In its day it was regarded as a breakthrough – a cynical, deglamorising tale of the nightclub scene, and the fact that the 'hero' turned gigolo was regarded as mildly shocking.

Gene Kelly leapt to stardom in it in December 1940 — more for his dancing and his personality than for his singing one suspects, and Robert van Mackelenberg in the Perth production also scores on personality and stylish graceful movement. He plays Pal Joey, the seedy, irresistable smooth-talking go-getter with great vitality, looking like a smalltime crook from B-grade movies with oddly unexpected touches of Ronald Coleman. The singing works most of the time, except in the tedious big hit of the show "I could write a book", which, judging by innumerable boring recordings by better qualified singers is impossible to make interesting and always seems to be delivered at half speed.

Mercifully all the other numbers are either witty, or brisk, or both so that the general level of enjoyment is very high. Terry Carke has adapted the work to the realities of present day tastes and budgets by dispensing with the 'dancing boys' (who have no place in the story), and made his chorus girls (who do) individual characters with a high sense of comedy. The girls (of assorted ages and shapes) and their routines are hilarious, and both their singing and dancing are the strength of the show.

This is not to say that there are no opportunities for personal highlights. Rosemary Barr is utterly glamorous as the slumming millionairess Vera who fancies Pal Joey. She sings the marvellous "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (with the gutsy original lyrics) with elegant insolence and steely femininity. She's expensive, pampered, knowing, but just a touch vulnerable.

The other two show-stoppers are without doubt the send-up stripper number "Zip" performed with verve and deadpan comedy and precision by Alice Dale, and also Sally Sander's red hot mama number (called "That Terrific Rainbow" and backed with a suitably awful satin rainbow and girls lugging cardboard clouds in support).

Acting cameos are provided by James Beatty as the paralytically drunk husband toted about by the predatory Vera and later as the con-man out to fleece Joey and Vera, though it puzzled me why he began the character as an enigmatic pyschopath and ended as a run-of-the-mill crook. Ross Coll appears in innumerable disguises — most effectively as a stage-struck waiter, and Ivan King provides a couple of the frosty superior employee-types he does so well.

Julia Moody as the ingenue almost loved and finally left by Joey has the right quality of ardent naivety, though singing is not her strong point, and the straight dialogue in the spoken scenes doesn't give her much chance either. writing zippy stage dialogue wasn't John O'Hara's strong point, who adapted his own New Yorker stories for the libretto.

Tony Tripp's sets are a delight — from the clever revolving pet-shop street-scene to the fashion magazine interiors of Vera's world, and the costumes are respectively stunning and riotous as needed, working in perfectly with Colin Griffith's amusing and inventive choreography.

A little too set-up

SHADOW BOX

by Colin O'Brien

Shadowbox by Michael Cristofer Hole in the Wall Perth WA Opened April 1 1981
Director **Edgar Metcalfe** Designer **Gene Banducci**; Stage Manager **Helen Godecke**
Cast Interviewer **Sharon Kershaw**, Joe **Maurie Ogden**, Steve **John Tarrant**, Maggie **Helen Tripp**, Brian **Tim Walker**, Mark **Michael van Schoor**; Beverley **Polly Low**, Agnes **Gillian Lomberg**; Felicity **Margaret Ford**
(Professional)

Shadowbox is of a peculiarly American species of the dramatic genre Agonising in a Crisis. Often such plays take place in an institution, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* being perhaps the example which leaps to mind. Questions raised usually involve 'What is Life, and how has mine slipped away?', 'How do I face Death?', 'You never really loved me, did you?' and quite often 'What is Normal, for Chrissake?'. Usually the cold but efficient treatment in institutions comes into view, and people who professionally help others for the kicks they get out of watching the patient suffer, oh and the alienation of Modern Life. At its best these matters receive serious treatment, but there is a tendency to sentimentality and glibness, a *Reader's Digest* 'Unpack your suitcase and live!' level of philosophy. *Shadow Box* is a respectable example of this type of play, to my mind at least as much so as *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Three people, terminal patients we soon learn, are living in bungalows attached to a hospital, interviewed from time to time with people watching from behind one-way glass. Apparently they form part of a psychological research experiment in the way people face death. The clinically 'nice' interviewer sends a chill down your spine (and presumably the patient's too). Each patient is visited by loved ones, so we see how the nearest and dearest are coping, or failing to cope with the situation. Merely to relate each of the three situations illuminates the play.

In the first bungalow is a workingclass man (Joe, wouldn't you guess) who is visited by his wife and teenage boy. In the second is an old woman in a wheelchair cared for by her dowdy, dutiful daughter, but her mind is ever on her younger, wilder girl. In the third a decidedly second-rate (or worse) writer is looked after by a male friend, and is visited by his ex-wife dancer (ie hooker). The play neatly shifts from one situation to another, before the agony gets too much to bear (astute or merely evasive! wonder?). Though at the time moving, in retrospect both the juxtapositions and carefully selected situations seem just a little too set-up.

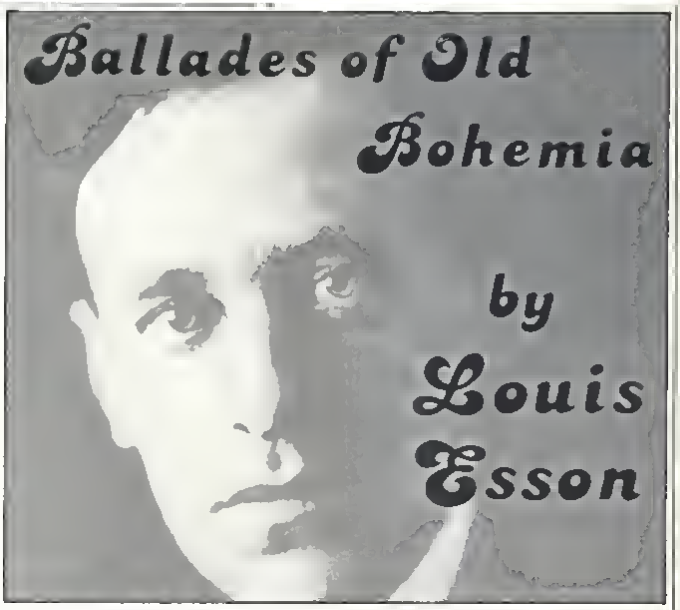
The play is adeptly directed by Edgar Metcalfe, functionally designed by Gene Banducci and generally well-acted. Noticable was Gillian Lomberg as the dowdy daughter, as skillful and moving as we have seen her in more glamorous roles. Although no masterpiece, *Shadow Box* is concerned enough and potentially popular enough to warrant inclusion in the repertoire of a subsidised theatre company, and the Hole has done us no disservice in presenting it.

BOOKS

Fascinating insight

by John McCallum

Ballades of Old Bohemia by Louis Esson Red Rooster Press rrp $10 95
The Entertainers ed Clive Unger Hamilton Pitman rrp $29 95
The Guardsman by Ferenc Molnar Methuen, rrp $5 95
The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov Methuen, rrp $5 95
Home etc by David Storey Methuen rrp $3 50



It is ironic that one of the best known nationalist theatre movements in Australia, Louis Esson's Pioneer Players in the 1920s, should have arisen in imitation of an overseas model — Dublin's Abbey Theatre And it is strange that Esson himself, with all his desire to establish a nationalist Australian "folk" theatre, should have been so sycophantically dependent on the advice of W B Yeats and J M Synge Esson wrote: "I have always looked on Mr Yeats as the High Priest of Literature, in every point of literary doctrine I should consult him in the same spirit as a student of the Middle Ages might have consulted Abelard or Aquinas on a difficult question of divinity" Not a comment one would except from a pioneer of local drama

Synge himself gave Esson the now famous advice "You must have plenty of material for drama all those outback stations with shepherds going mad in lonely huts" Esson and many of the dramatists who followed him made those huts one of the great cliches of Australian drama

Another odd thing is that all that the modern reader has easily available of the work of "Australia's Pioneer Dramatist" are a couple of one-acters and an unrepresentative "political" comedy. The average theatregoer might be justified in asking why Esson holds the respected position he does

To add to the confusion there is now *Ballades of Old Bohemia*, an anthology of Esson's verse and short writings which at least includes all the one-act plays but still leaves at least half a dozen full-length plays virtually unobtainable

This gap aside, *Ballades of Old Bohemia* gives a fascinating insight into the contradictions in the writing of this earnest man His early taste for cosmopolitan bohemian life (with colourful characters sitting around in Parisian-style cafes arguing about life and art) gives way gradually to a deliberate and self-conscious concern with "folk" values discovered in the bush, which in turn gives way to a weary disillusionment as the hopes and dreams of Esson and his young intellectual and artistic fellow-crusaders came to nothing in post World War I Australia

The book includes a number of bush ballads and slum short stories written in an almost incomprehensible vernacular, many articles of social comment and artistic review, and, of course, the one-act plays which many people think was Esson's natural form The overall impression is of a man pulled in several different directions but never in a direction where there was the support and reward he needed as a writer In particular of course the theatrical poverty of his time greatly inhibited his development as a playwright

The volume contains the plays *The Sacred Place*, a neat little study of personal conflict resolved by cultural tradition in Melbourne's Moslem community at the beginning of the century, *The Woman Tamer* a city comedy of petty crims and their molls, *Dead Timber* a short harsh drama of the hard effects of the land on the rockies who tried to settle it, and *Vagabond Camp*, a jolly tinker's comedy of low life on a river bank There are also two short dialogues, *Terra Australis* and *Australia Felix*, which although they will probably never find a place on the stage, at least illustrate the sincerity of Esson's nationalism

The Entertainers, edited by Clive Unger-Hamilton is described by the publishers as a "biographical history of the stage, its players, writers, directors, showmen and clowns" but it is difficult to see exactly what use it will be It is very handsomely produced, and has some fine illustrations, but it certainly does not provide a historical view of the theatre As a biographical dictionary it would have some use except that the entries are arranged chronologically and not alphabetically Listing all those players, writers, etc in order of the year of their birth (regardless of their influence or even nationality) is rather arbitrary, and makes for some odd bedfellows

Two volumes in the Methuen Theatre Classics series were published some time ago but have not yet been announced in these columns Ferenc Molnar's *The Guardsman* is published in translation by Frank Marcus and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in a new translation by Michael Frayn From Penguin there is a volume of plays by David Storey *Home*, *The Changing Room* and *Mother's Day*.

ACT

THEATRE

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
An Evening with Billy Connolly. June 19
CANBERRA PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)
The Late by Rene Obaleta, *The Jewish Wife* by Brecht, director Camilla Blunden June 9-19
REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP (47 0781)
Jigsaw Company presents *Outpost* by Robert Love, director, Graeme Brosnan. TIE programme for secondary schools *Punk For Preps*, director, Graeme Brosnan. *A One Woman Poetry Show* for secondary colleges, director, Graeme Brosnan Throughout June
THEATRE THREE (47 4222)
Canberra Repertory's *Old Time Music Hall*, director, Rosemary Hyde; piano, Andrew Kay and Norma Robertson Throughout June

DANCE

CANBERRA THEATRE (49 7600)
Triple Bill, monotones, poems and *Carmen* by The Australian Ballet June 12,13
PLAYHOUSE (49 6488)
Human Veins Dance Theatre June 19-27

For entries contact Janet Healey on 49 2669

NSW

THEATRE

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (357 6611)
Adult Tours. *Human Veins Dance Theatre*, North West and North Coast areas until June 16
School Tours *Jim Stopford*, for infants and primary, South Coast and metropolitan areas from June 9
Book Book Theatre Company, drama for infants and primary; Central West from June 9
Norman Berg, for infants and primary, Riverina from June 9
Jan Carter, for infants and primary, North West and Hunter areas from June 9
Sidetrack Theatre Company drama for infants and primary, North Coast and Hunter areas from June 9
Mr Jupiter's Children's Theatre for infants and primary, metropolitan area from June 9
CAPITOL THEATRE (212 3455)
Elvis The Stage Spectacular with Vince Eager, Bo Wills and J J Mclean Throughout June
ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877)
I Ought to be in Pictures by Neil Simon, directed by Hayes Gordon, with Julie Bailue Sharon Flanagan and Brian Young Throughout June
FRANK STRAIN'S BULL N' BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (358 1968)
The Good Old, Bad Old Days, with Barbara Wyndon, Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Lorain, directed by George Carden Throughout June
GENESIAN THEATRE (55 5641)
Waiting in the Wings by Noel Coward, directed by Elizabeth Lyndon Until June 6
The Private Ear and The Public Eye by Peter Shaffer, directed by Steven Lawsen Commences June 13
GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY (333 817)
Stables Theatre
Two one act plays including *Bridal Suite* by Barry Dickins, directed by Jenny Laing Peach Until mid June
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)
Evita by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, directed by Harold Prince, with Jennifer Murphy, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Tony Alvarez Continuing
HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (26 2526)
Playboy of the Western World, director, Aarne Neeme
KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92 1415)
Kirribilli Hotel, Milson's Point
The Private Eye Show by Perry Quinton and Paul Chubb, music by Adrian Morgan, lyrics by P P Cranney, directed by Perry Quinton, with Zoe Bertram Jane Hamilton, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson Into June
MARIAN STREET THEATRE (498 3166)
You Never Can Tell by George Bernard Shaw, directed by Terenee Clarke, with Patrick Dixon Susan Leith, Alan Wilson, Maggie Blinco, Katrina Foster, Alan Robin, Redmond Phillips, Peter Rowley and Gordon McDougall Throughout June
MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (977 6585)
Pardon Our Privates directed by Peggy Mortimer; with Ron Frazer, Maggie Stuart and Lee Young Until June 27
NEW THEATRE (519 3403)
The Workroom by Jean-Claude Grumberg, directed by John Tasker, with Sharon Hills, Frank McNamara, Tim Kniver and Sian Pugh Throughout June
NIMROD THEATRE (519 3403)
Upstairs *Cain's Hand* by Alan MacKay presented by the St Martins Youth Arts Centre, directed by Helmut Bakaitis Until June 7
Teeth 'N' Smiles by David Hare directed by Neil Armfield, with Michele Fawdon Commences June 17
Downstairs *Protest by Vaclav Havel*, directed by Aubrey Mellor Commences June 10
NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)
Theodore for primary schools and *The Unheard World of Jasper Lawson* for secondary schools, both directed by Ian Watson with Nola Colefax, David London, Colin Allen, Bill Eggerking and Rosemary Lenzo Throughout June
PHILLIP STREET THEATRE (232 8570)
Henry IV Part I an adaptation of William Shakespeare's play, directed by Matthew O'Sullivan Commences June 2
PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (30 7211)
The Lion in Winter by James Goldman, directed by Vincent Ball Until June 13
Q THEATRE (047 21 5735)
We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay! by Dario Fo, directed by Rick Billinghurst Penrith until June 6, Orange from June 9 to 13 and Bankstown from June 17 to 20
STUDIO SYDNEY (267 3806)
Wayside Chapel,
Miss South Africa by Barney Simon with Olive Bodill, and *The Death of Minnie* by Barry Dickins, with Leila Blake Commences June 9
THE ROCKS PLAYERS (569 0223)
The Revengers Tragedy by Tourneur, directed by Peter Cudlipp Commences June 26
SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 3948)
Free drama workshops on weekends Shopfront Theatre Touring Company touring metropolitan and country areas with *The Tale Play* directed by Don Munro and *The Third World Horror Show* directed by Michael Webb Youth Theatre Showcase *The Third World Horror Show* and *Dumper Room* created by young people and directed by Don Munro June 19, 20, 26 and 27
SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (20588)
Drama Theatre, SOH
Chicago by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, directed by Richard Wherrett, musical direction by Peter Casey, with Nancye Hayes, Geraldine Turner Terry Donovan Judi Connelli, George Spartels and JP Webster Commences June 6
THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)
The Dresser by Ronald Harwood directed by Rodney Fisher with Warren Mitchell,

Gordon Chater and Ruth Cracknell Throughout June

DANCE

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET
Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre *Monotones, Carmen, Poems* June 19-20

OPERA

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (20588)
Opera Theatre, SOH
Tosca by Puccini, conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario, with production by John Copley, *La Traviata* by Verdi, conducted by Richard Bonynge, with production by John Copley; *Alcina* by Handel, conducted by Richard Bonynge, with production by Sir Robert Helpmann In repertory from June 13

For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200/909 3010

QLD

THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
Treats by Christopher Hampton, director, Bruce Parr; with Michael McCaffrey, Jennifer Flowers and Allan Hough to June 13
Once In A Lifetime by George S Kaufman and Moss Hart, director, Ian Thomson, designer, Graham McKenzie From June 18
LA BOITE THEATRE (36 1622)
Scanlan by Barry Oakley, director, Neil Armfield, with Max Gillies. June 4-13
The Homecoming by Harold Pinter, director, Malcolm Blaylock From June 24
POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE (36 1745)
Ring theatre for details
QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 3861)
No Names, No Packdrill by Bob Herbert, director, Peter Duncan, designer, James Ridewood, with Graham Harvey, Mervin Canning, Duncan Wass June 12-27

TN COMPANY (352 5133)
Brookes St *Skuz n'Frenzi* group devised from Shakespeare's *Comedi of Errors*, director, Bryan Nason To June 6

TOOWOOMBA ARTS THEATRE (30 1300)
The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui by Bertolt Brecht, director, Mick Rodger June 15-27

DANCE

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET
Her Majesty's Theatre *Monotones, Carmen Poems* June 2-6

For entries contact Jeremi Ridgman on 377 2519

SA

THEATRE

ACTING COMPANY (233 4333)
In schools *Smile, Smile, Smile* director, Sue Rider June 9-19
ARTS THEATRE (212 5777)
Angas St *Watcher On The Rhine* by Lilian Hellman director Ron Robinson June 6-13

LA MAMA
Crawford Lane, Hindmarsh *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas, director, Bruno Knez June 15-27
The Club by David Williamson, director, Jim Daly June 29-July 18
Q THEATRE
89 Halifax St *This Happi Breed* by Noel Coward, director, Barry Hill June 20-July 18

STAGE COMPANY
Space Theatre *The Harding Women* by Clem Gorman, director, John Noble June 4-21

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51 5151)
Theatre 62 *Farewell Brisbane Ladies* by Doreen Clarke, director, Kevin Palmer, designer, Sue Russell June 17-July 4
Playhouse *Lulu* by Wedekind, adapted by Louis Nowra; director, Jim Sharman, designer, Brian Thompson, costume designer, Luciana Arrighi, music, Sarah de Jong, lighting designer, Nigel Levings, with Judy Davis June 5-27
TROUPE
Old Unley Town Hall *Samizdat* by John Russell; director, Keith Gallasch June 16-July 4
Fools Gallery Theatre Company presents *It Bleeds It Sleeps* Director, Carol Woodrow To June 6

THEATRE EXCHANGE
Playhouse, Hartley CAE *Double or Nothing* written and realised by Warwick Cooper, designer, Max Mastrosavis, musical director, Shamus Rhind, choreographer, Caroline Bishop June 1-14

For entries contact Edwin Relf on 267 5988

TAS

THEATRE

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
Snow White To June 6
Same Time Next Year with Peter Adams June 8-20
Irene with Theatre Royal Opera Company June 26-July 11

SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY (23 5259)
King Lear workshop June 1-12 In rehearsal June 15-July 10

For entries contact Karen Hamilton on (02) 29 1818

VIC

THEATRE

ALEXANDER THEATRE (543 2828)
Same Time Next Year, director, Don MacKay, with Peter Adams and Kirsty Child Throughout June
Can Can with the Monash University Company June 11-13, 17-20
Pirates Of Penzance by Gilbert and Sullivan Performed by Melbourne Music Theatre June 25-July 4

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (347 7133)
Front Theatre *Artaud at Rodez* by Charles Marowitz director, Peter Freidrich Throughout June

ARENA THEATRE (241 1937)
Touring Lower Primary *Accidentli Yours*

devised by Magpie TIE Team Throughout June
Touring Upper Primary *Get To The Point* devised by Arena Theatre based on a story by Harry Nilson Throughout June
Drama Workshops throughout June
ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (529 4355)
Touring Victorian Country and Tasmania *Same Time Next Year*, director, Don MacKay, with Kirsty Child and Peter Adams
Touring Primary and Lower Secondary *Aesops Fables* by Mixed Company
Touring Primary *Puppet Power* by Marionette Theatre Company
Touring Secondary *Boom Battle Bust* by Mixed Company

BANANA LOUNGE (419 2869)
Late Show *Lenny Would Love It!* Throughout June

COMEDY CAFE THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 2869)
Dr Cloth, The Most Intelligent Man In The World plus, *The Theresa O'Reilly Explosion* devised and performed by Mitchell Faircloth, Tracey Harvey and David Shepard Throughout June.

COMEDY THEATRE (662 3233)
Whose Life Is It Anyway? by Brian Clark, director, Brian Hewitt, with Robert Coleby By arrangement with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust To June 15

CROSS WINDS COMMUNITY THEATRE (62 3366)
Youth Theatre Workshops in Mansfield, Bennall, Shepparton and Wangarratta Throughout June

FOUR'S COMPANY COMMUNITY THEATRE (311 755)
Touring HSC Literature Programme Brecht, Shakespeare, and The Greeks Throughout June

FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41 3727)
Expo Con And Vince 81 with Tony Rickards, Simon Thorpe and Tony Edwards Throughout June

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6226)
Downstairs *Fairground Snaps* Director, Terry O'Connell, with Mick Conway Throughout June

LA MAMA (347 6085)
I Am Who You Infer devised by Meredith Rogers, based on the letters and poems of Emily Dickinson June 4-7
The Appointment written and directed by Kathy Mueller, with Margret Ricketts, Mark Shirelfs, David Swan and Vicki Eagger June 11-28

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (654 4000)
Athenaeum Theatre *A Man For All Seasons* by Robert Bolt, director, Simon Chilvers, designer, Paul Kathner To July 4
Russell Street Theatre *Einstein* by Ron Elisha director, Bruce Myles, designer, Richard Prins To June 6
The Hothouse by Harold Pinter, director, Judith Alexander, designer, Anna French June 10-Aug 1
Athenaeum 2 *Beecham* by Carol Brahms and Ned Sherrin, director, Ron Rodger, designer, Christopher Smith To June 27

MILL THEATRE COMPANY (222 318)
Mill Nights
Mill Club for children
Traditional Folk Dance Workshops with Faye McAlinden Folk Festival at The Mill with the Geelong Folk Club

MUSHROOM TROUPE (376 7364)
Flying Heroes devised by the company director, Alison Richards Throughout June
MURRAY RIVER PERFORMING GROUP (376 7364)
Touring Schools *School For Clowns* with MRPG
Crystal Dew Drops, touring Community Centres and Clubs Workshops throughout June
OPEN STAGE (347 7505)
1789 director, Daryl Wilkinson June 2-8
Snow Angel and *Doing A Good One For The Red Man*. June 30-July 4
PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY (634 888)
Upstairs *Dance Of Death* by August Strindberg, adapted and directed by Roger Pulvers, designer, Peter Corrigan Throughout June
THEATRE WORKS (285 0444)
The Go Anywhere Show by the company Touring Community Centre throughout June
UNIVERSAL THEATRE (419 3777)
Shows in rehearsal
WEST COMMUNITY THEATRE (370 7034)
Touring Club Show *Just A Simple Bloke* with Phil Sumner, Ian Shrives and Greg Sneddon
Touring Football Clubs in the Western Region *The Players* by Ray Mooney Throughout June
AMATEUR THEATRE COMPANIES
Basin Theatre Group (762 1082)
Clayton Theatre Group (878 1702)
Heidelberg Rep (49 2262)
Malvern Theatre Co (211 0020)
Pumpkin Theatre (42 8237)
1812 Theatre (785 3964)

DANCE

AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE COMPANY (341 8462)
Schools programmes throughout June
THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET
Geelong Arts Centre *Coppelia* June 26, 27

NATIONAL THEATRE (534 0221)
Aranjuez, Spanish Dance Theatre June 28

OPEN STAGE (347 7505)
Australian Dance Theatre Workshop performance June 9-12

For entries contact Connie Kramer on 861 9448

WA

THEATRE

DOLPHIN THEATRE (380 2440)
J B by Archibald McLeish, director, James Large June 8-20
HAYMAN THEATRE (350 7026)
WAIT *She Stoops To Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith director, Jenny McNae June 17-27
HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)
Whose Life Is It Anyway by Brian Clark, director, Brian Hewitt Jones, with Robert Coleby June 15-July 4
PERTH ACTORS COMPANY (325 3500)
St George's Hall *Uncle Vanya* by Chekhov, director, Ken Campbell-Dobbie with Libby Stone and Lionel Farrell June 19-July 4
PLAYHOUSE (325 3500)
On Our Selection based on the book by Steele Rudd, director, John Milson June 13-July 11
REGAL THEATRE (381 1557)
Submariner by Tom McClenaghan, director, Frank Baden Powell, set by Bill Dowd, with Barry Geighlan, Robin Stewart and Bernie Davis June 2-20
WINTER THEATRE (335 5444)
Princess May Theatre, Freemantle *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* by Dario Fo, director, Ross Coll, with Robert Alexander From June 5

DANCE

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)
WA Ballet Company presents *Peter Pan* choreographed by Garth Welch, music, Verdon Williams. June 2-13

For entries contact Margaret Schwan on 341 1178

From page 13.

of Western region life that the company believes it is ultimately contributing to the broader sense of our identity as Australians."

While MRPG sees themselves as "a bridge between two communities (Albury Wodonga), between individuals, between imagination and creative expression, between the old — our heritage — and the new — developing a community vision." Theatreworks talks of being "a mirror whereby people's lives are elucidated and the forces and influences on them clarified, and the possibilities for change seen".

Within their particular regions the groups see themselves as catalysts, leaveners and integrators of the community who can create a circular relationship between people in the community who are both their audience and the source of material, and the theatre which is created from this audience and performed for that audience. The responsibility of the groups as creative artists is to ensure that the work that they produce in this way is excellent. As Jan MacDonald of WEST puts it "People give you their all; their lives are your sources. If the work you produce from it is not excellent in the eyes of your audience then they cannot help but see it as a reflection of the quality of their lives."

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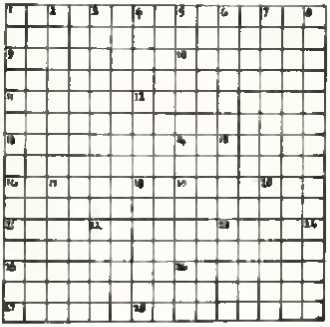

THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 32

Name

Address

P/code

The first correct entry drawn on June 25 will receive one year's free subscription to *TA*.

The winner of last month's Crossword was Rod Lumer of Ashgrove, Qld.

Across.

1. Put back up the bobbin that's by Mrs Peron and Lawrence (9)
6. Carol bowled over by the dramatist (5)
9. Gives confidence to mules around the old town (7)
10. Jewel worn by a fairy, mark (7)
11. Explosive item found in southern hothouse (5)
12. Animal covering mule racked with croup (9)
13. Coached Ted at the beginning and end of a disorganised trip (7)
14. Spill beer round the record and leave for a while (4,3)
16. Examine any seal for decomposition (7)
19. In the scullery, find marshal without hesitation (7)
21. Pass nothing into the Roman at this meal (21)
23. Doctor to employ rodent
25. Stray from the fashionable to the alternative mistakenly (2,5)
26. Catch exclamations in the pipes (7)
27. Journalist going after gun deprived of privileges (5)
28. Stop to attach something round her back (9)

Down:

1. Mares rewrite screeds (5)
2. German lady in the east is the least demanding (7)
3. Choirmaster? (5,4)
4. Seamen get fish about any number of them, and flee (7)
5. Convey what was formerly a cupboard (7)
6. Cyril is lilting a verse (5)
7. But for nothing Bohemian would have a red nose! (9)
8. Little boy under the car and on the robot (9)
13. Model going broody because of Maggie's work? (9)
15. "You may do it —, for it is nothing but roaring." (A Midsummer Night's Dream)
17. Cleansing colour in the worker (7)
18. Queen it over an Irishman in Africa (7)
20. A Gaul — he might be made for carrying (7)
22. Bitter and sarcastic about right (5)
24. Released without about fifty (5)